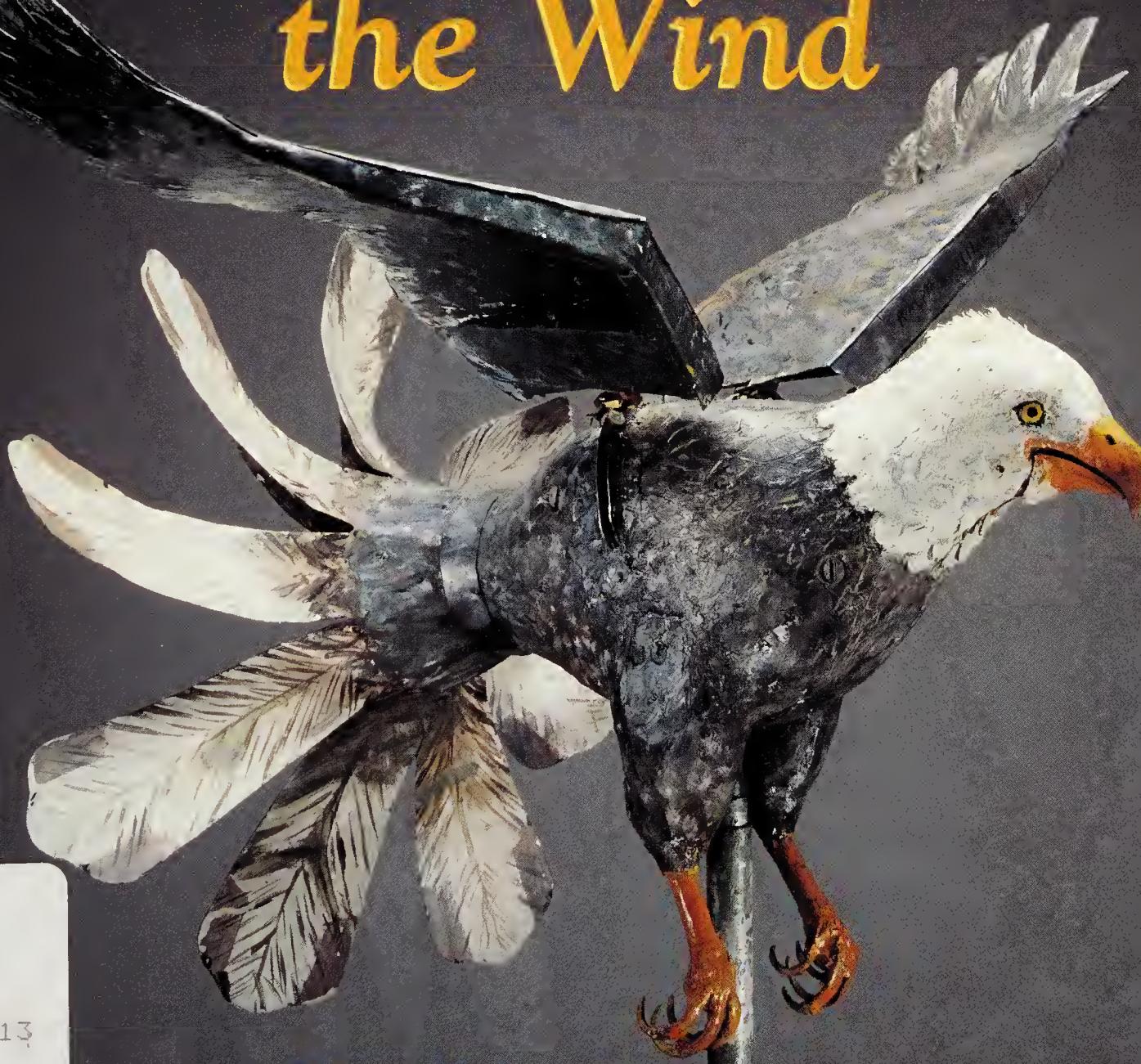


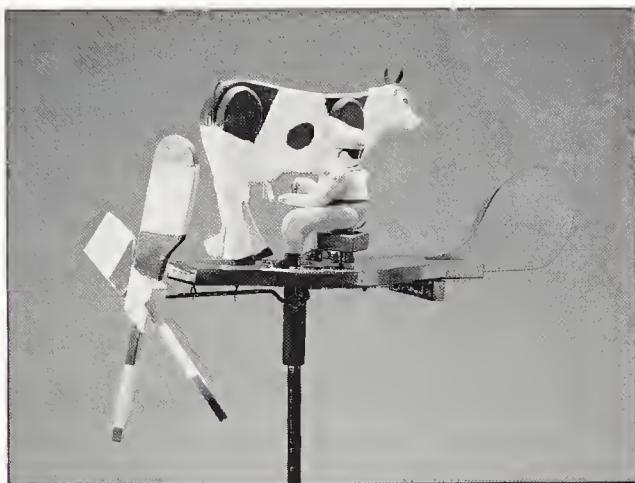
# Playing with the Wind



Pierre Crépeau

NK  
9585  
.M8713  
1991

# Playing with the Wind



*The Whirligig Collection of the  
Canadian Museum of Civilization*

Pierre Crépeau

BATA LIBRARY  
TRENT UNIVERSITY  
PETERBOROUGH

Canadian Museum of Civilization

© 1991 Canadian Museum of Civilization

---

**Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data**

---

Canadian Museum of Civilization

Playing with the wind : the whirligig collection of the Canadian  
Museum of Civilization

Issued also in French under title: Jeux de vent.

ISBN 0-660-12923-X

1. Weather vanes — Canada — History — Exhibitions.

2. Folk art — Canada — Exhibitions.

I. Crépeau, Pierre, 1927—

II. Title.

III. Title: The whirligig collection of the Canadian Museum of  
Civilization.

---

NK9585.M8713    1991    745.593    C91-098739-4

---

Printed and bound in Canada

Published by

Canadian Museum of Civilization

100 Laurier Street

P.O. Box 3100, Station B

Hull, Quebec

J8X 4H2

Cover photo: See p. 19.

Title page photo: See p. 31.

Photography: Doug Millar

Editing: Catherine Cunningham-Huston

Production: Deborah Brownrigg

Design: Francine Boucher

Canadä

# *Table of Contents*

---

Acknowledgments	4
Introduction	5
Scarecrows	9
Arm-waving Whirligigs	13
Birds	17
Airplanes	25
Occupations and Trades	31
Fancies and Fantasies	41

# Acknowledgments

---

My thanks first of all to Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies (CCFCS) registrars John Corneil and George Barnhill, who patiently and untiringly helped me locate the whirligigs in the Museum's collections at a time when their energy was being channelled into moving to a new location and adapting to new administrative structures.

Thanks also to the CCFCS cataloguers, Monique Morrissette and Barbara Dexter, who provided expert assistance in retrieving files and documentation on the whirligigs. Pauline Portelance assisted me in the early stages of the research. John Staunton was extremely helpful in handling the whirligigs and showing them to me. The objects were photographed by Doug Millar. Catherine Cunningham-Huston edited the text. Deborah Brownrigg supervised the production, and Francine Boucher prepared the design.

# Introduction

---

Folk art reflects a society's traditions. It is a nostalgic reminder of the symbols and passions that influenced the lives of our ancestors.

Folk art also traces a contemporary adventure into the realm of the imagination. Using different shapes and colours, artisans express their whims, visions, dreams, fantasies, and humour. Whether fanciful creations, bewildering inventions or stunning oddities, these contemporary works of folk art faithfully echo the inner drives of their creators.

Instances of this art appear wherever fantasy has free reign. Phantasmagoric visions of the universe and its creatures, staggering eccentricity, exaggerated eroticism, and impudent, oddball humour—all are portrayed in folk art.

One of the liveliest and most whimsical outlets for Canadian contemporary folk artists is undoubtedly lawn ornaments. In peaceful rural settings, one may spot these varied and joyous ornaments, which combine ingenuousness with imagination, and dexterity with daring. A perpetual smile seems to animate these playful, nonsensical objects. Lawns are in fact one of the most popular settings for such everyday art, which some hesitate to categorize as folk art because it lacks the prestige of age.

Of particular interest among all these curious objects are the various inventions that play with the wind. Humans have always attempted to harness the wind to make their lives easier. The wind has been used to pump water, mill grain, and saw wood. According to historians, the windmill was invented in Persia in the mid-seventh century, and was finally adopted in Europe in the twelfth century. In rural Canada, before

the advent of electricity, every farm operated its own windmill to pump water for the livestock.

People have harnessed the wind not only to lighten their daily workload, but also to add pleasure to their lives. From their porticoes, the Chinese hang delicate lanterns decorated with ornaments that jingle in the slightest breeze; they are said to gladden the hearts of the household members. And who can forget the childhood delight of watching the movement of a simple paper propeller pinned on the end of a stick? Hours could be spent playing outside with this fragile object, in gentle breezes or gusting winds. The childhood pinwheel is the most basic form of whirligig. However, there are more complex and durable wind toys, adult toys that evoke bygone days, reflect obscure fantasies, and display astonishing ingenuity.

The Canadian Museum of Civilization's whirligig collection is fairly modest. This is partly because even today curators need a certain amount of courage to acquire for the Museum's collections objects that many still view merely as ridiculous flights of fancy. In addition, whirligig makers are often reluctant to part with their creations, which are a great source of personal pleasure. Nevertheless, this collection does include interesting examples of this particular facet of Canadian contemporary folk art.

The whirligigs illustrate various themes. Some, such as the scarecrows, have an obvious practical function. Others vividly represent traditional occupations and trades. Yet others are purely whimsical and serve no purpose other than the sheer pleasure of creation. The favoured motifs are birds and planes—wind devices par excellence. Finally, some of the whirligigs are objects that have been imaginatively and creatively recycled.

## **Notes**

1. The titles in quotation marks have been supplied by the artisans themselves.
2. Dimensions are in centimetres, rounded off to the half centimetre and, unless otherwise indicated, given in the following order: length x width x height.
3. The abbreviation CCFCS stands for the Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies.



# Scarecrows

---

In recent years, the use of Javex bottles as scarecrows has become increasingly popular across Canada. The technique is simple: a few pieces are cut out of the body of the container, and the bottle is mounted upside down on a metal or wooden stake. At the slightest breeze, the container turns and produces a kind of whistling noise, which scares off birds. Some of these scarecrows are decorated with drawings of geometric patterns, flowers, birds or whimsical motifs.

1 and 2

## Scarecrows

Mrs. Alex Senyk

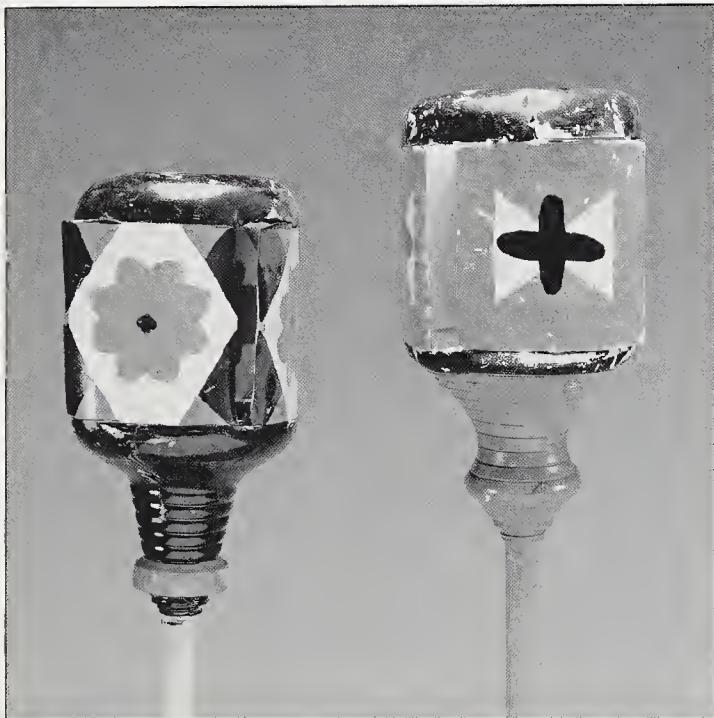
Inglis, Manitoba

1960s

Plastic, paint

16 (diam.) x 60; 16 (diam.) x 60

CCFCS 70-91; 71-700



**3 and 4**  
**Scarecrows**  
Mrs. Alex Senyk  
Inglis, Manitoba  
1960s  
Plastic, paint  
16 (diam.) x 55; 15.5 (diam.) x 60  
CCFCS 70-90; 70-89



**5**  
**Scarecrow**  
Mrs. Alex Senyk  
Inglis, Manitoba  
1960s  
Plastic, paint  
16 (diam.) x 31  
CCFCS 71-702

Mrs. Senyk's scarecrows are ornamented with traditional Ukrainian geometric and floral patterns, and occasionally with birds.

**6**

### **Scarecrow**

P. Pinelle

Carillon, Quebec

1969

Plastic, reflective adhesive tape

18 (diam.) x 30.5

CCFCS 70-88

This scarecrow is decorated to look like a mask, its features drawn with reflective tape.



**7**

### **Scarecrow**

Paul Moskal

Grandview, Manitoba

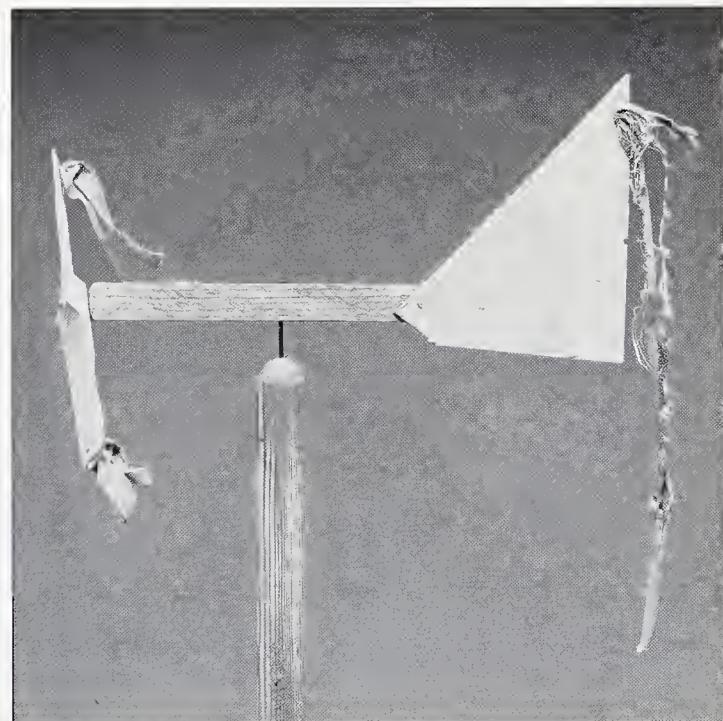
Late 1960s

Wood, fabric, string, paint

29 x 19 x 3

CCFCS 70-200

The craftsman made this very simply designed scarecrow to keep robins away from his strawberry patch. The wide surface of the tail fin points the device into the wind. The propeller turns, and the ribbons flap in the wind and frighten the birds.





# Arm-waving Whirligigs

---

The classic whirligig is a figure—often a soldier, policeman or politician—that waves its arms in rapid rotation. The mechanism is more complex than it appears. The arms are articulated at the shoulders and connected to each other by a rod that runs through the body so that the movement of one arm is automatically transmitted to the other. The flat surfaces of the arms are at right angles to each other. Each arm has its own function. The arm with its flat surface facing the body holds the figurine into the wind while the other, with its flat surface in line with the body's axis, catches the wind head-on. The constantly alternating arms draw wide circles and whirl slowly or rapidly depending on the force of the wind.

8

## Ship's Ensign

*Nova Scotia*

Circa 1900

Wood, paint

35 x 13.5 x 41

CCFCS 81-72 (G. Ferguson Coll.)

The arms of this naval officer are equipped with half-moon vanes. This little figurine curiously resembles an officer of the Japanese navy.



9

**Policeman**

*Mustard family*

*Elgin, Ontario*

*Late nineteenth century*

*Wood, leather, iron, paint*

*20 x 10 x 66.5*

*CCFCS 79-1723 (P. & R. Price Coll.)*

This figurine is a humorous representation of a traffic officer. The broad circles drawn by his paddle-like arms convey a sense of exasperation and futility in dealing with some chaotic traffic jam.

10

**Majordomo**

William Hartwick

Fisherville, Ontario

Circa 1870

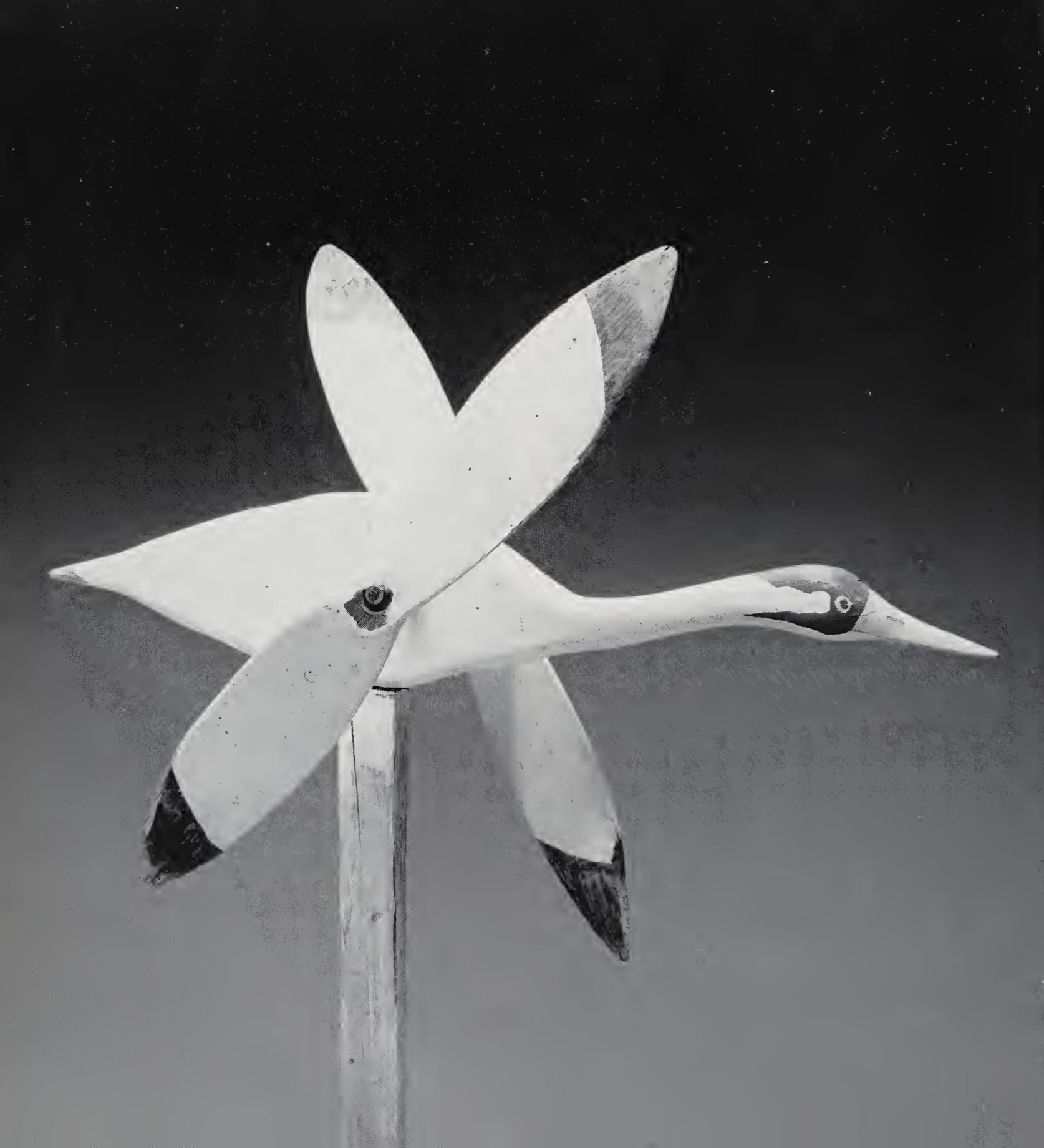
Wood, paint

22 x 19 x 82

CCFCS 83-896.1-2

This figurine exudes a subtle humour. The majordomo looks very impressive in his uniform. But his enormous white gloves, his top hat slanted to the front and his sleek, twirled-up moustache give him a mischievous look, which contrasts with the usual solemnity of the position.





# Birds

---

The bird is obviously a popular whirligig motif. Its anatomy offers interesting mechanical surfaces: the tail and wings easily catch the wind and lend themselves admirably to all kinds of fanciful renderings. There are various types of bird whirligigs. Some catch the wind with wings that turn like propellers. Craftsman Ralph Boutilier's birds catch the wind with their tails; the rotating tail activates a mechanism that moves the bird's wings and, in the case of the sea gull, the fish in the beak. Other bird whirligigs move on a drive shaft activated by a propeller. The bird has long been perceived as a messenger between heaven and earth, a symbol of humanity's spiritual aspirations. It is perhaps because of this mystical quality that birds continue to evoke the imaginative fancy of artisans and a sense of wonder in people of all cultures.

11

## Snow Goose

*N. Stewart*

*Nova Scotia*

*Date unknown*

*Wood, iron, paint*

*120 x 21 x 72*

*CCFCS 76-470*

This snow goose is extremely elegant. Obviously choosing to ignore anatomical details but without straying too far from nature, the artisan created this remarkably simple and compelling whirligig.



12  
**Hutsulian Duck**

*Kost Pawlyk*

*Elk Point, Alberta*

1980

*Wood, copper, iron, paint*

*50 x 28 x 37.5*

*CCFCS 81-236*



13  
**Hutsulian Duck**

*Kost Pawlyk*

*Elk Point, Alberta*

1980

*Wood, copper, iron, paint*

*53 x 40 x 50*

*CCFCS 89-640.1-2*

One of these ducks has two pairs of propellers for wings, and the other has three pairs. The propellers are well balanced on a spindle set perpendicularly to the bird's body and are held in place by copper bearings that ensure smooth and regular rotation. The artisan, an Albertan of Ukrainian background, decorated the pieces with bright colours and geometric patterns reminiscent of traditional Hutsulian designs, from western Ukraine.

14

### Bald Eagle

Ralph Boutilier

Milton, Nova Scotia

Circa 1975

Wood, sheet metal, iron, paint

102 x 71 x 155

CCFCS 76-474



15

### Sea Gull and Whiting

Ralph Boutilier

Milton, Nova Scotia

1975

Wood, sheet metal, iron, paint

102 x 60 x 148

CCFCS 77-370

The son of a tugboat captain, Ralph Boutilier acquired an impressive list of skills in a variety of fields such as painting, carpentry and mechanics. He had already made a name for himself in building model ships and painting for tourists when in 1968, he turned to making "something beautiful to go with the wind." Despite a few false starts, Boutilier's creative efforts eventually yielded a flock of wind-driven birds: a blue jay, a kingfisher, this bald eagle, and this sea gull devouring a whiting. The mechanics of the sea gull whirligig are ingenuous: The tail feathers form a rotor that spins in the wind and activates a mechanism inside the bird's body, causing the wings to flap and imparting a back-and-forth motion to the whiting in the gull's beak.





16

### Flock of Birds

*Joseph Lajoie*

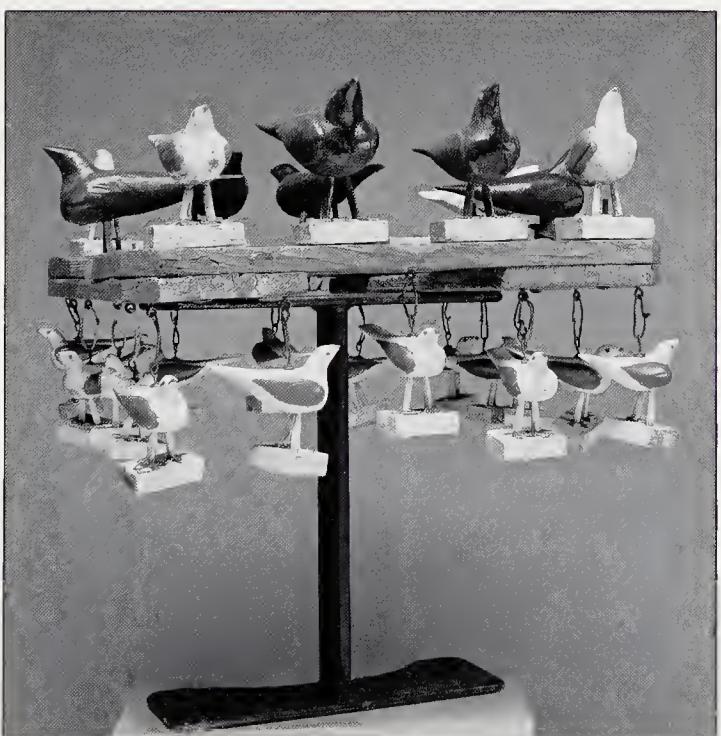
Saint-Gabriel-de-Brandon, Quebec

1970s

Wood, iron, paint

79 x 50 x 50

CCFCS 77-464 (N. Sharpe Coll.)



17

### Flock of Birds

*Joseph Lajoie*

Saint-Gabriel-de-Brandon, Quebec

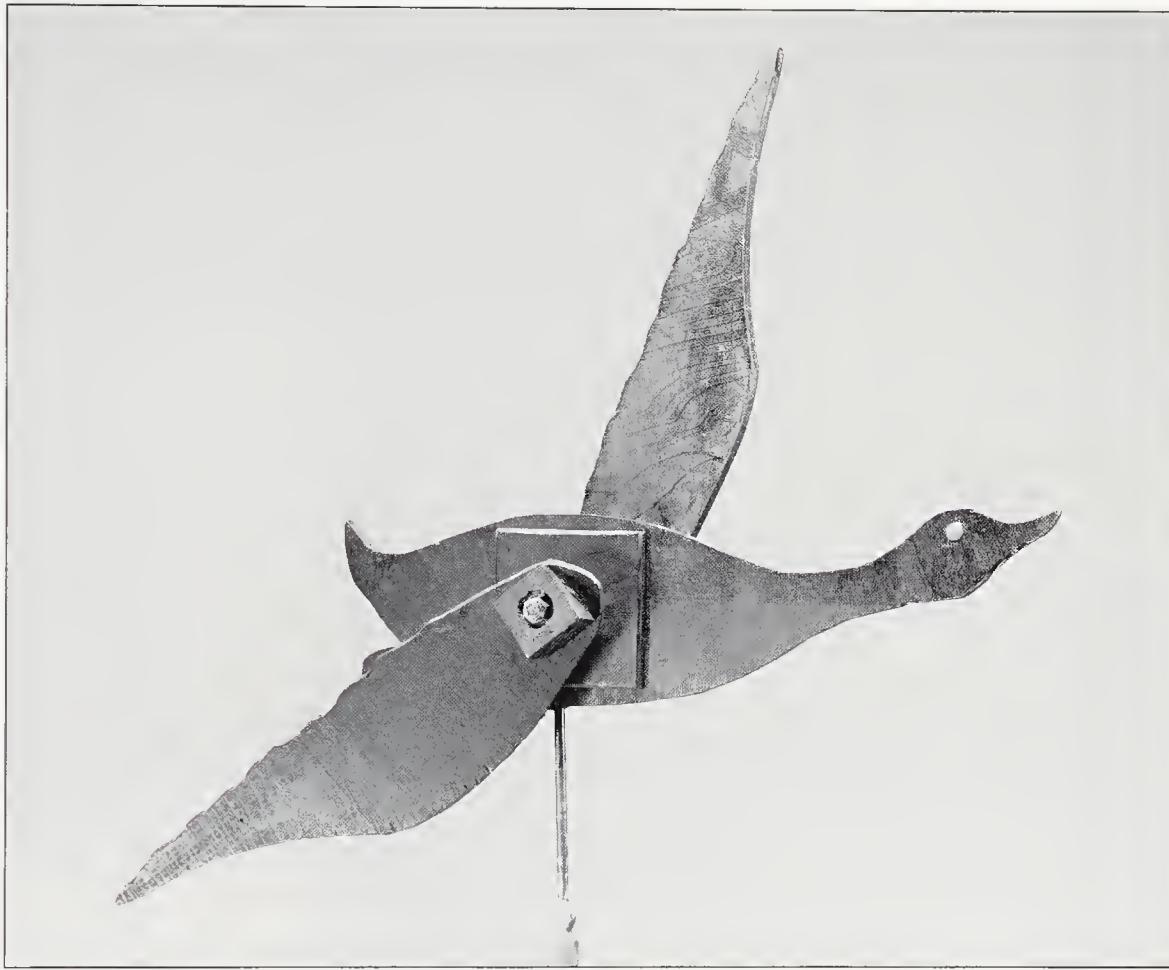
1970s

Wood, iron, paint

67 x 65 x 37

CCFCS 77-466 (N. Sharpe Coll.)

A farmer all his working life, Joseph Lajoie stayed active in his retirement years by turning his hand to various crafts, including carving and whirligig making. His yard became crowded with all sorts of ingenuous creations, particularly birds, which seem to have fascinated him. The two whirligigs shown here illustrate flocks of birds that resemble sea gulls. The first uses a propeller to activate a cross-shaped wood structure. At each end sits a bird, with another bird suspended below. Activated by the propeller, the cross traces alternating circles, causing the suspended birds to rock slightly. The second device is more a mobile than a whirligig as it is not wind-driven. Only the suspended birds move in the wind.



18

**Black Duck**

Gaston Mayrand

Grondines, Quebec

1968

Wood, iron, thumbtacks, paint

61 x 11 x 26.5

CCFCS 70-86

This sleek duck in flight is made of three pieces of plywood. The wings are mounted perpendicularly to the bird's body, and distanced and balanced by metal bearings. Red thumbtacks are used for the eyes.



19

### Mallard Taking Flight

Martin Yankovick

Kingston, Ontario

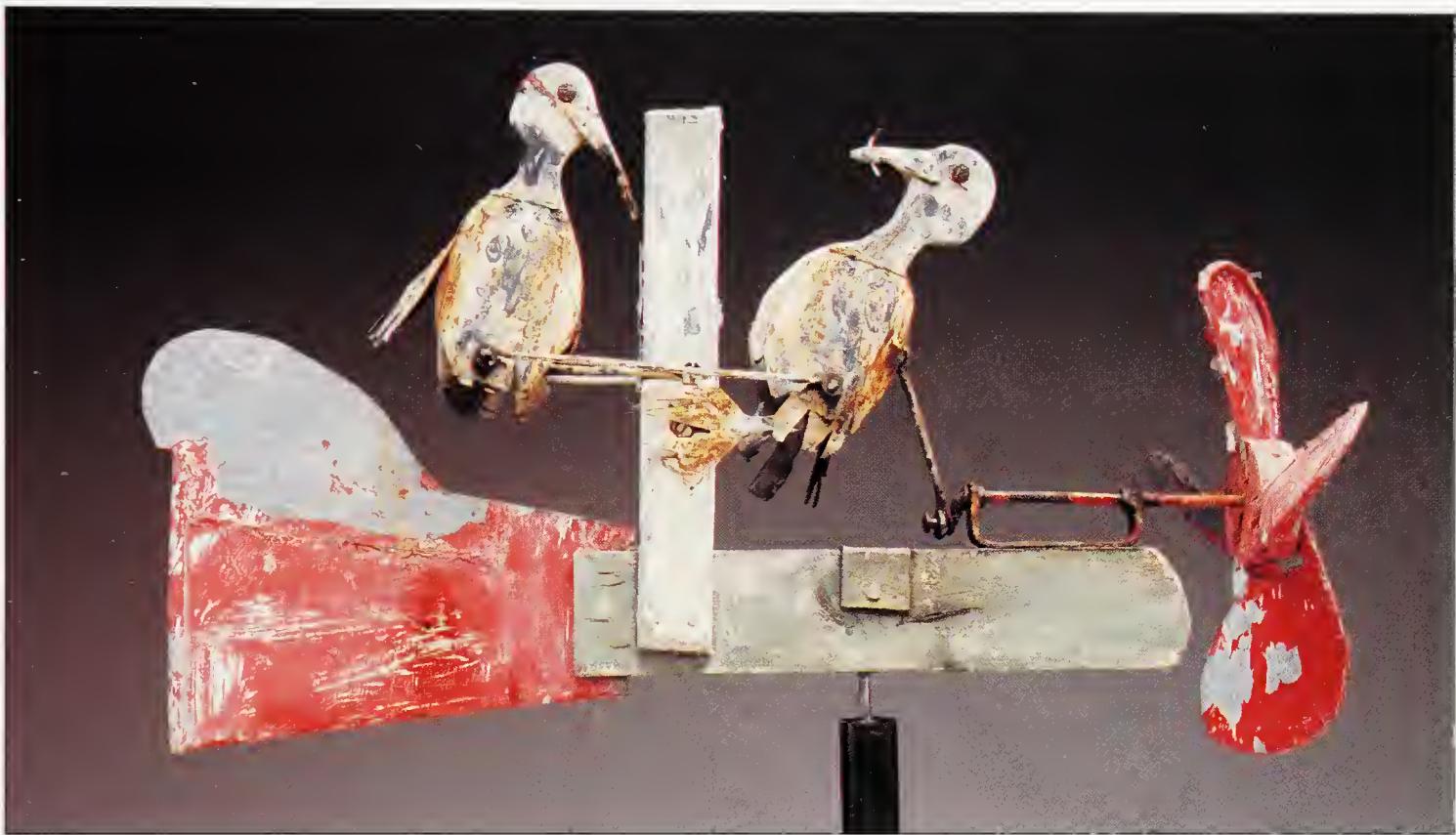
1930s

Wood, sheet metal, paint

69.5 x 50 x 58

CCFCS 84-68

When in motion, this whirligig creates the convincing illusion that the mallard is about to take off from its support, which looks a little like a plane. The wide tail fin causes the object to point into the wind. The propeller spins in the wind and activates a mechanism that makes the wings flap.



20

### Woodpeckers at Work

Cobourg, Ontario

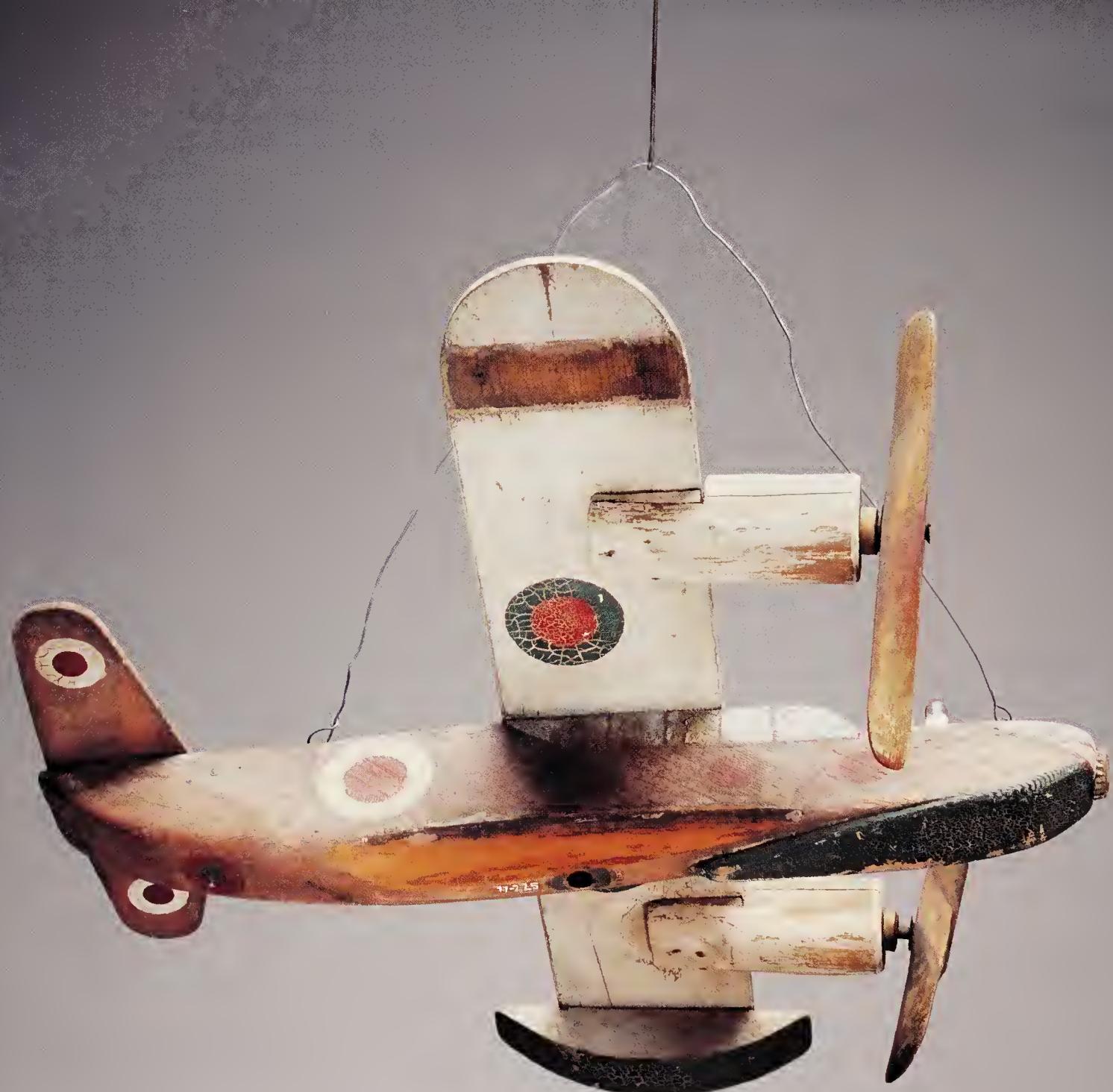
Date unknown

Wood, sheet metal, paint

65 x 28.5 x 64

CCFCS 77-222 (P. & R. Price Coll.)

These two woodpeckers, mounted on a drive shaft, simulate the work of these climbing birds on a tree ravaged by insects.



# Airplanes

---

People have always dreamt of flying like a bird, soaring blissfully in the heavens, enraptured by the dizzying heights, the sense of infinite space, and the rushing wind. In Greek mythology, Icarus was the first successful aviator but was killed in the process. Wearing wings of wax, he managed to take off; but, intoxicated with his success, he flew so high that the sun melted his wings, and he plunged to his death in the sea. However, the tragic fate of Icarus did not deter humans from conquering the skies. With the invention of the airplane, we broke earthly chains, overcame gravity and narrowed distances. We can now travel at breathtaking altitudes and lightning speeds, far surpassing the bird. Fast, powerful, delicately engineered and hard to manoeuvre, the airplane has become a symbol of humanity's yearning for freedom and infinity. It has stirred the imagination and challenged the skill of artisans who have represented it in various forms, particularly in whirligigs.

21

**Hydroplane**

Quebec

*Date unknown*

Wood, glass, metal, paper

60 x 66 x 24

CCFCS 77-225

This hydroplane is perhaps a scale model of the tank planes used in fighting forest fires.



22

**Tricoloured Airplane**

*Origin unknown*

*Date unknown*

*Wood, rubber, paint*

*64 x 53 x 43*

*CCFCS 00-1*

This brightly coloured little plane is both a whirligig and a scale model. Nothing is known of its origin or history.



23

**“CF 5678”**

*Ontario*

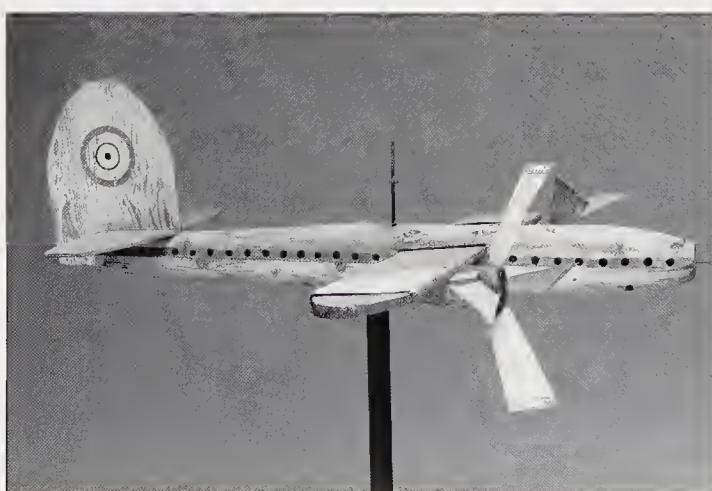
*Circa 1960*

*Wood, metal, iron, paint*

*149 x 116 x 36*

*CCFCS 79-419*

This biplane, made of plywood, reveals the technical dexterity of its anonymous creator. The inscription CF 5678 appears under the plane's wings.



24

**Airliner**

*Niagara area, Ontario*

*Between 1940 and 1960*

*Wood, sheet metal, paint*

*94 x 86 x 35*

*CCFCS 83-956*

This unique carrier, with its whimsical tail, conveys a touch of humour.



25

**"B-57"**

Alcide Saint-Germain

Saint-Antoine-Abbé, Quebec

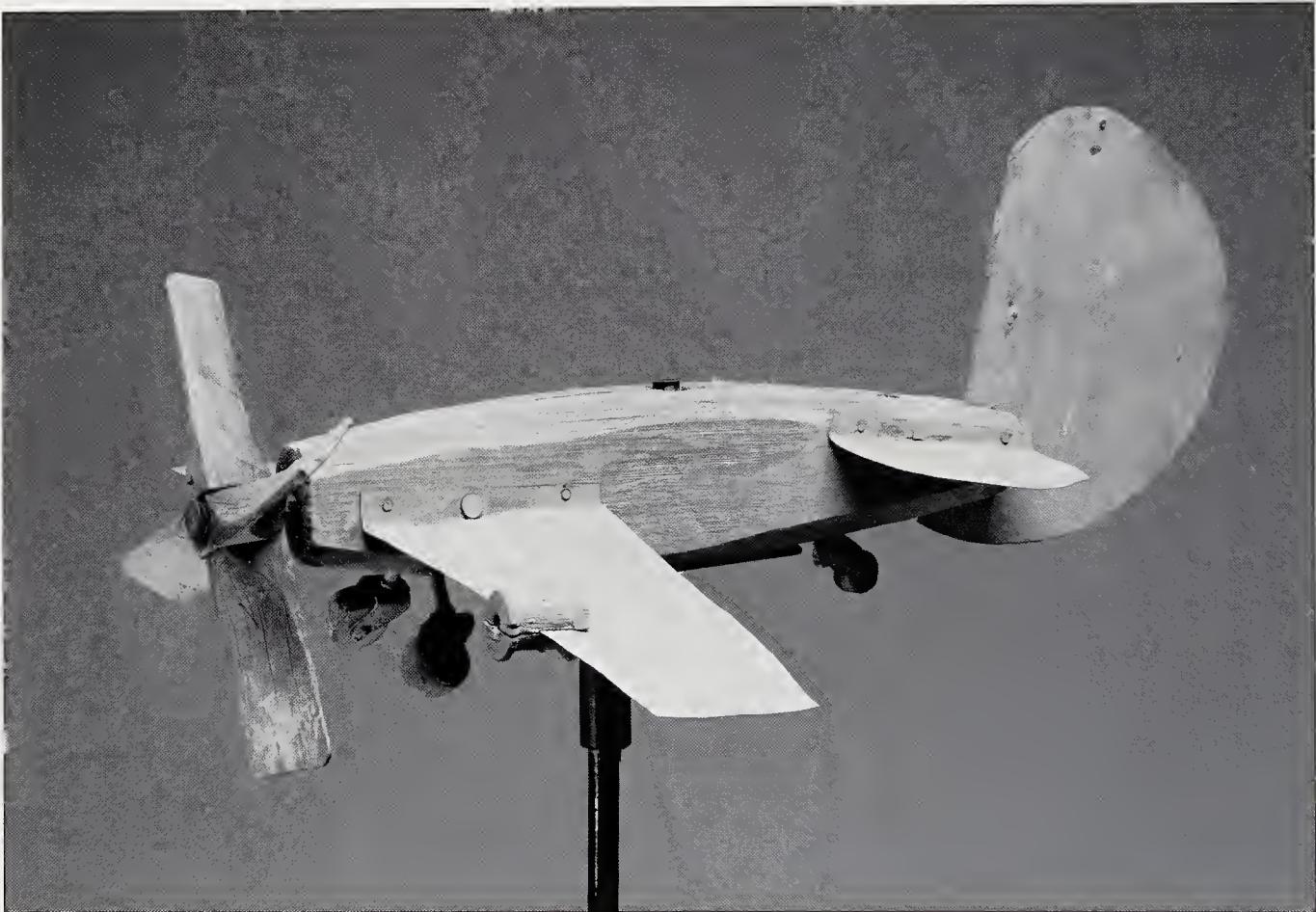
Between 1950 and 1975

Wood, sheet tin, rubber, paint

69 x 39.5 x 58.5

CCFCS 76-498

Alcide Saint-Germain's lawn was cluttered with wood carvings of all sizes. Mannequins, moose, giraffes, penguins, and all species of birds competed for space on the ground, on poles and in trees. This little red and white plane is activated by an eight-bladed propeller. Saint-Germain's father, Arthème, created six of the whirligigs shown in this book.



26

### Air Carrier

M. Tipert

New Germany, Nova Scotia

Between 1970 and 1976

Wood, sheet tin, paint

61 x 57 x 25

CCFCS 77-312

The body of this plane is carved from a single piece of wood, the wings and tail are cut from sheet tin, and the propeller is made of wood. As can be seen from the somewhat awkward lines, the artisan had not yet mastered the secrets of proportion.



27

**"C-100"**

F.B. Spafford

Dauphin, Manitoba

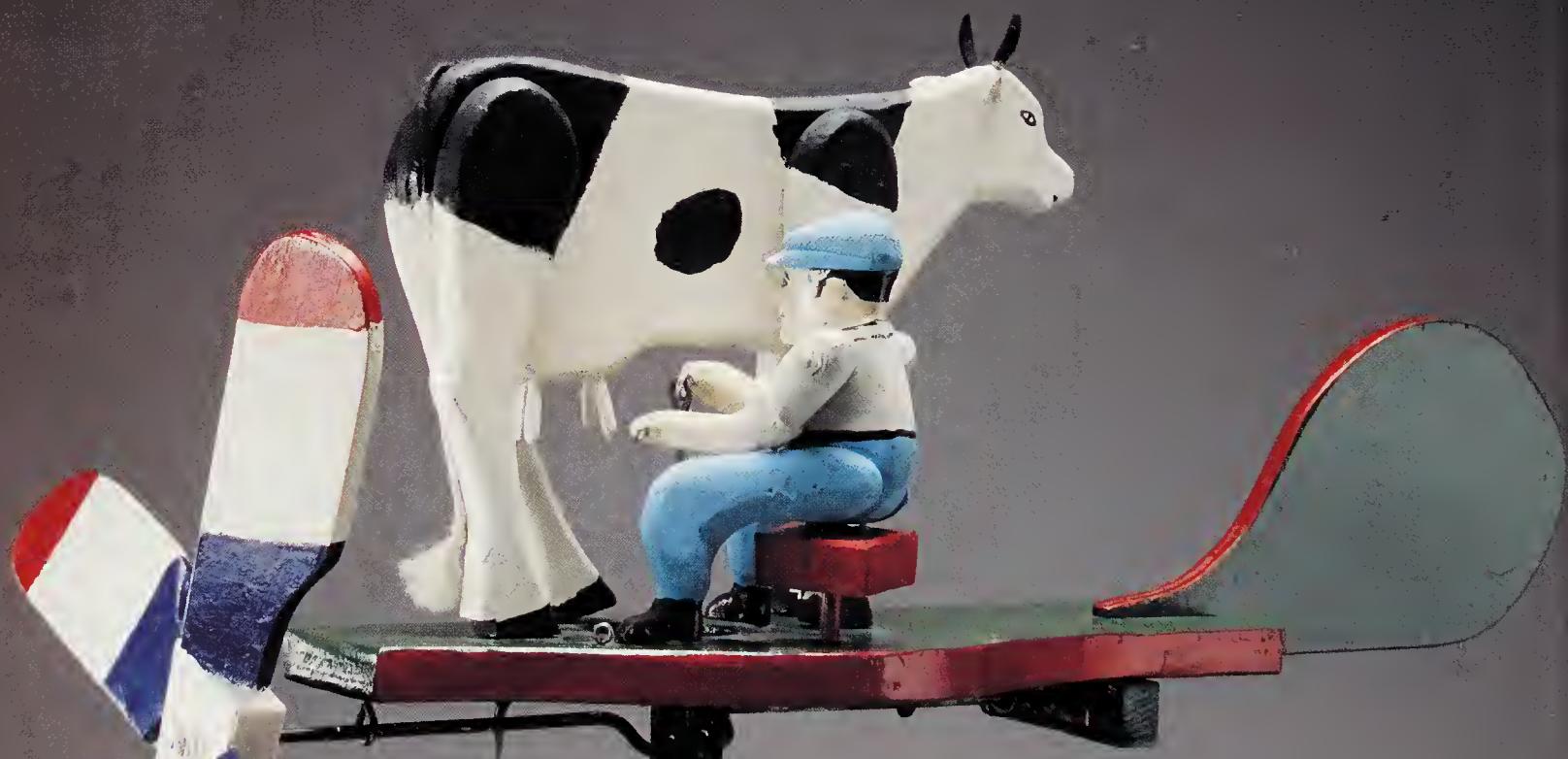
1960s

Wood, plastic, metal, paint

96.5 x 61 x 20

CCFCS 70-179

This biplane was originally mounted on a spindle, and the wires suspending it were added later. The detergent bottleneck mounted on the propeller axle conveys a feeling of power.



# *Occupations and Trades*

---

A fascinating technical challenge to whirligig makers is the transformation of circular motion into reciprocating motion. Any activity involving a back-and-forth motion is an ideal subject for whirligig artisans. Whirligigs also provide good opportunities to represent traditional activities such as cutting wood, milking cows, pumping water, and even fishing. There are two principal mechanisms for transforming circular motion into reciprocating motion. In one, a propeller rotates a crankshaft, which transmits a reciprocating motion to a connected limb or tool. In the other mechanism, a connecting rod transforms a wheel's circular motion into reciprocating motion through a fairly complex articulation system.

28

## **Milking**

*Arthur MacNeill*

*St. Peters, Prince Edward Island*

*1970s*

*Wood, iron, paint*

*60 x 28 x 36*

*CCFCS 82-51*

Arthur MacNeill, a teacher by profession, built up an impressive gallery of about one hundred carvings of more or less famous persons. This whirligig is a remarkably sensitive and fresh re-creation of a daily scene from his small village.



29

### Pit Sawyers

Ontario

Early twentieth century

Wood, iron, paint

59 x 45 x 40

CCFCS 75-906

In the eighteenth century, pit saws were the tools used to cut logs into planks. Early pit sawyers were itinerant, travelling from pit to pit with their own tools. This whirligig represents an early saw pit mounted on trestles. A propeller activates a crankshaft, which transmits a reciprocating motion to the two saws. This motion is in turn imparted to the articulated arms and hips of the three figures. The fin used to point the whirligig into the wind has been lost.

30

**Pit Sawyers**

Quebec

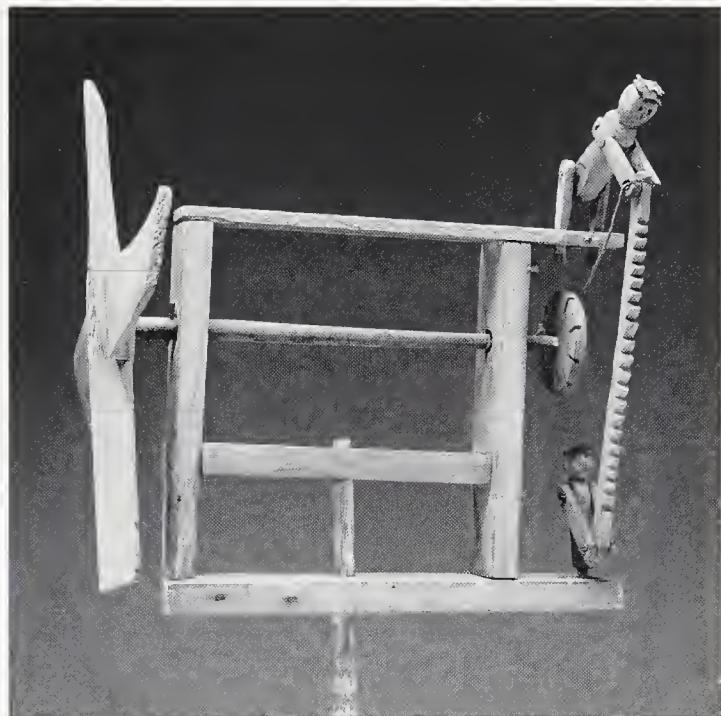
Late nineteenth century

Wood, iron, sheet metal, fabric, paint

48 x 34 x 101

CCFCS 83-1791.1-2 (P. & R. Price Coll.)

This whirligig also represents a saw pit mounted on trestles. The propeller is connected to a drive shaft with a wooden wheel on the end. A connecting rod attached to the wheel transmits to the top sawyer an upward reciprocating motion, which in turn is imparted to the saw and the bottom sawyer.



31

**Sawyer on Trestle**

Maritimes

Date unknown

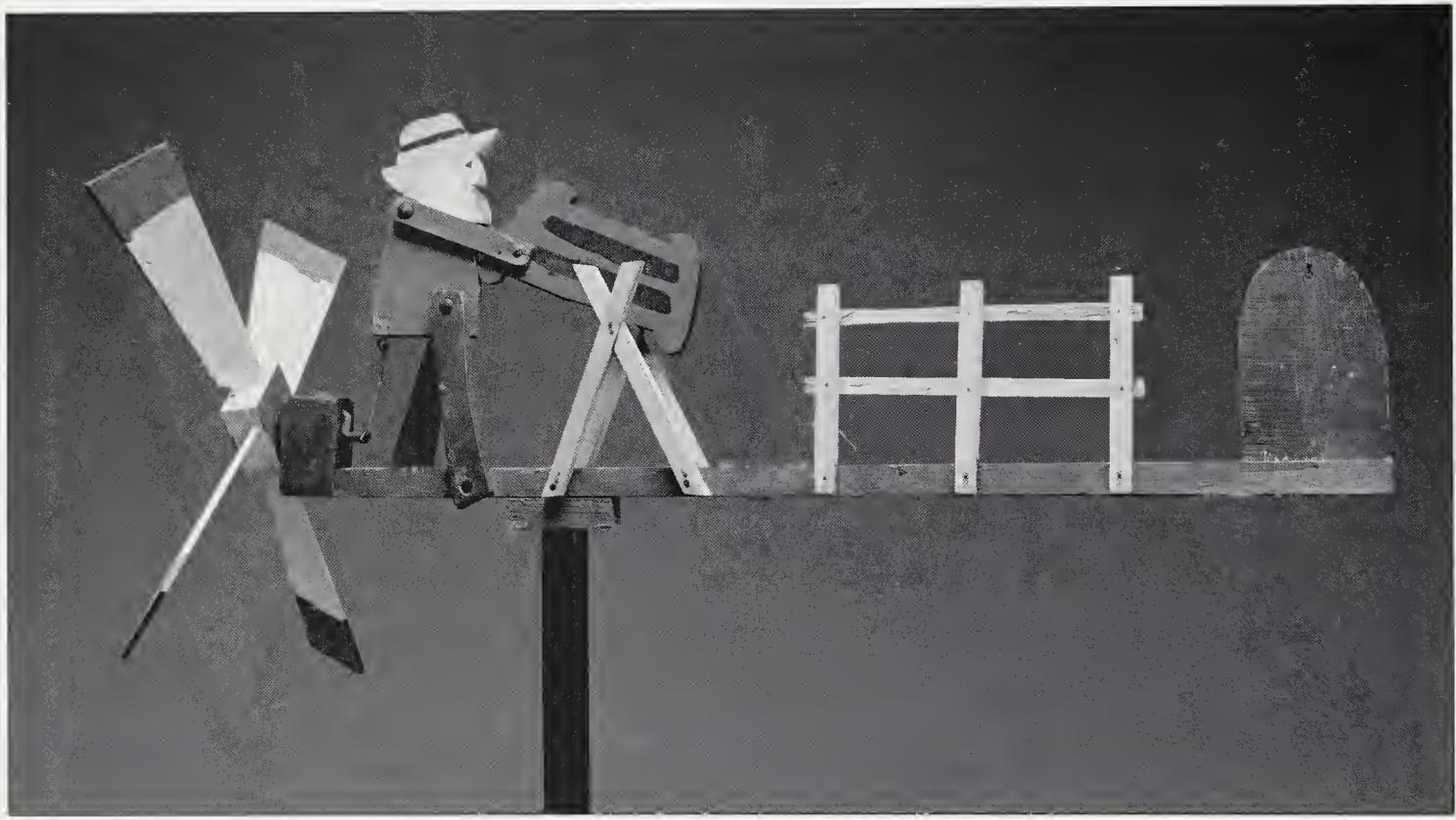
Wood, wire, paint

41 x 45 x 62.5

CCFCS 81-75 (G. Ferguson Coll.)

In this very curious model, the artisan's aim seems to have been to bring the scene into sharper relief by extending the mechanism out from it. Balance is achieved through a subtle interplay of masses and proportions.





32

### Sawyer on Trestle

Alvin R. Hart

Russell, Manitoba

Between 1950 and 1970

Wood, iron, paint

81 x 44 x 28

CCFCS 70-172

A World War I veteran and for a while a teacher on the Prairies, Alvin Hart spent years in the motion picture and theatre industry but had to retire early for health reasons. However, he still kept busy, by creating whirligigs that depicted traditional occupations. This particular whirligig transforms the dreary job of cutting wood into a charming bucolic scene.

**33**

**Sawyers on Trestle**

*Ontario*

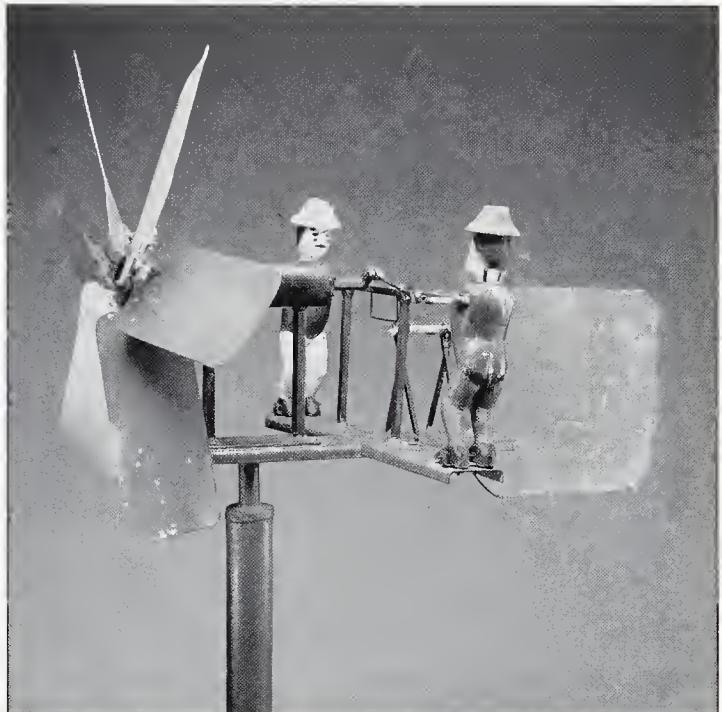
*Circa 1935*

*Sheet metal, iron, wood, wire, paint*

*67.5 x 49.5 x 185*

*CCFCS 79-1552*

This whirligig is both compact and clumsy. An enormous fin points the device into the wind, and a massive propeller activates a very short crank-shaft. Its bent section is connected directly to the saw, which in turn imparts a reciprocating motion to the two sawyers.



**34**

**Carpenter**

*Nova Scotia*

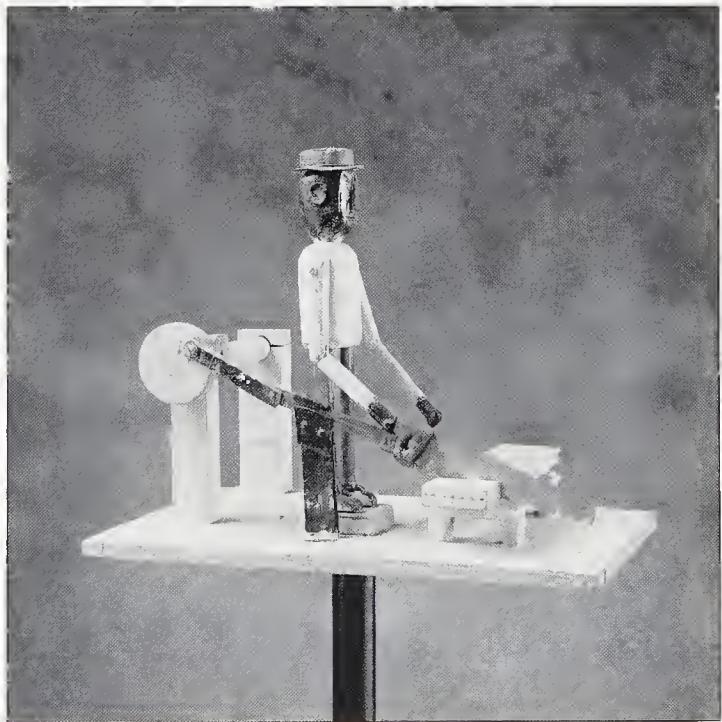
*Date unknown*

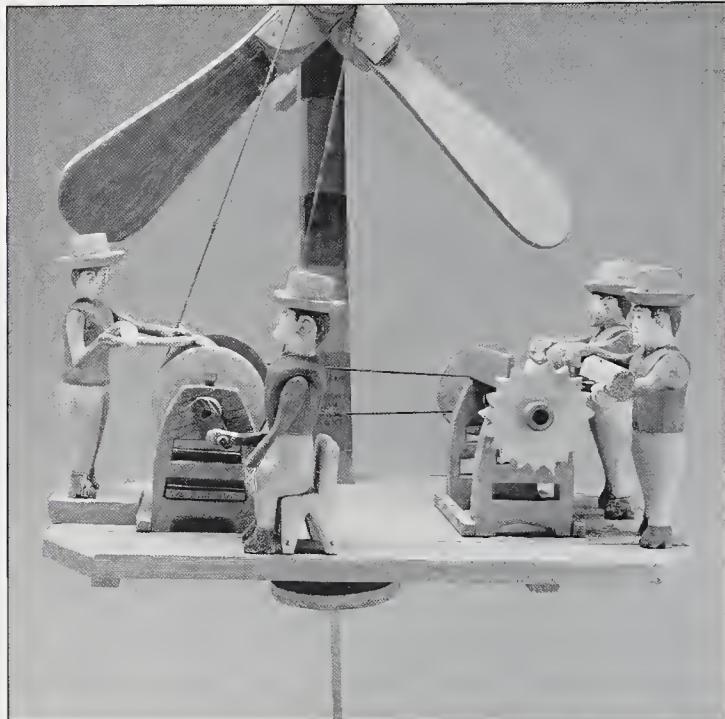
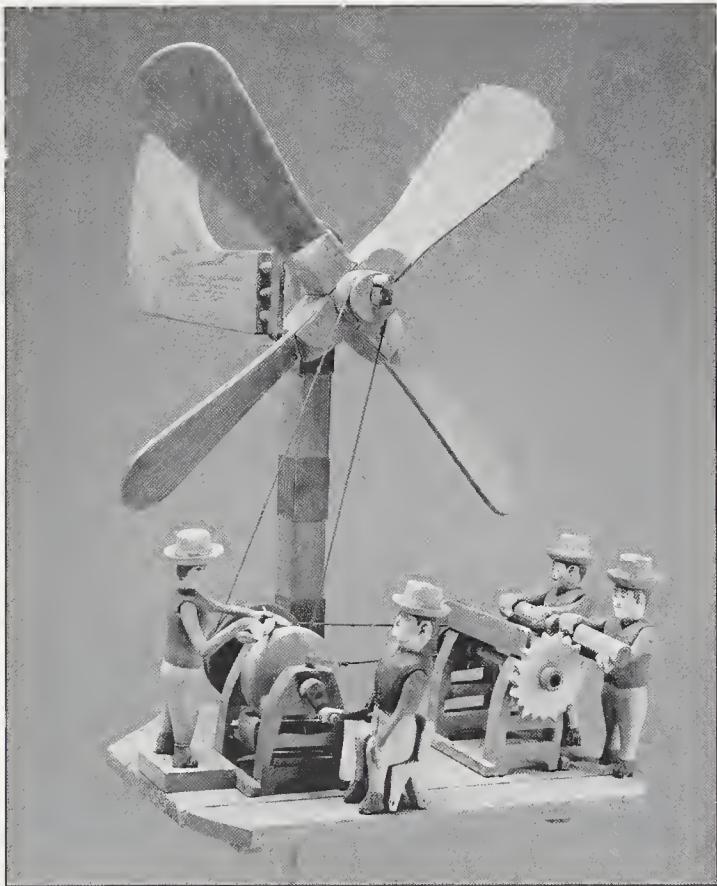
*Wood, sheet metal, paint*

*36 x 22 x 18*

*CCFCS 78-497*

This simple whirligig represents a carpenter sawing a beam. At one time, a propeller (unfortunately now lost) activated the drive shaft, which is equipped with a wooden wheel. The connecting rod transformed the wheel's circular motion into reciprocating motion in the handsaw.





35

### Cutting Up Firewood

Arthur Sauvé

Maxville, Ontario

1960

Wood, string, paint

84.5 x 54.5 x 88.5

CCFCS 89-26

This scene has an air of feverish haste. Two men are busy cutting logs with a circular saw while the other two are sharpening an axe to split the wood. A large propeller activates a system of pulleys, moving the circular saw and the grindstone, which is turned by the man on a small bench. The post in the middle bears the following inscription: *This hobby hand made by Arthur Sauvé, 1960, Marsh 9.*



36

### Sharpening the Axe

*Origin unknown*

*Date unknown*

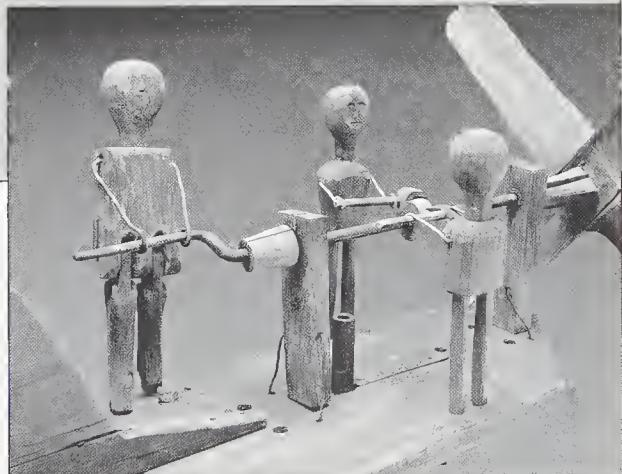
*Wood, iron, paint*

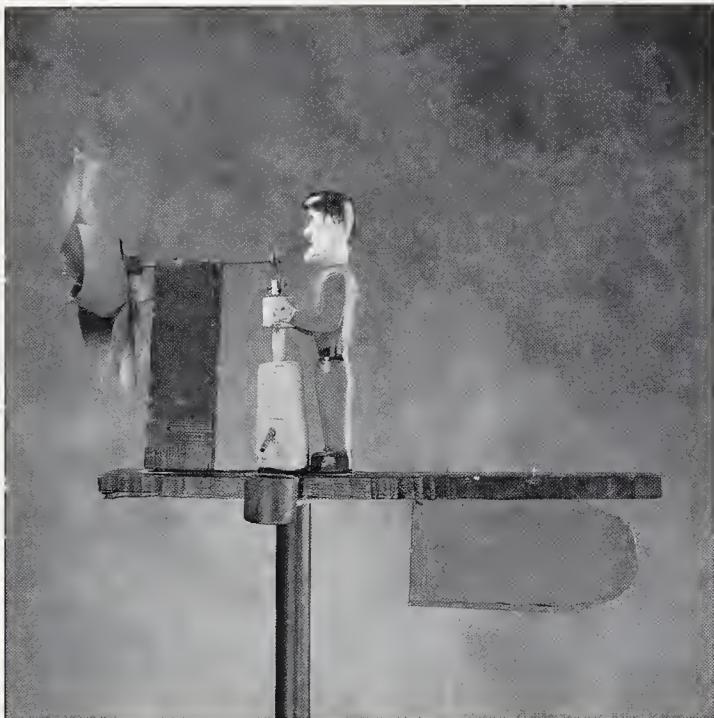
*104 x 40 x 39*

*CCFCS 79-1541*

A large fin keeps this whirligig pointed into the wind. The propeller activates a drive shaft equipped with a wooden disc, which represents a grindstone. There are three figures: one holds the axe to the grindstone, another pours water over it, and the third turns the crank.

Only the third figure is connected to the drive shaft; the other two are immobile. The origin of this little masterpiece is unfortunately unknown.





37

### The Well

M. Mackie

Nova Scotia

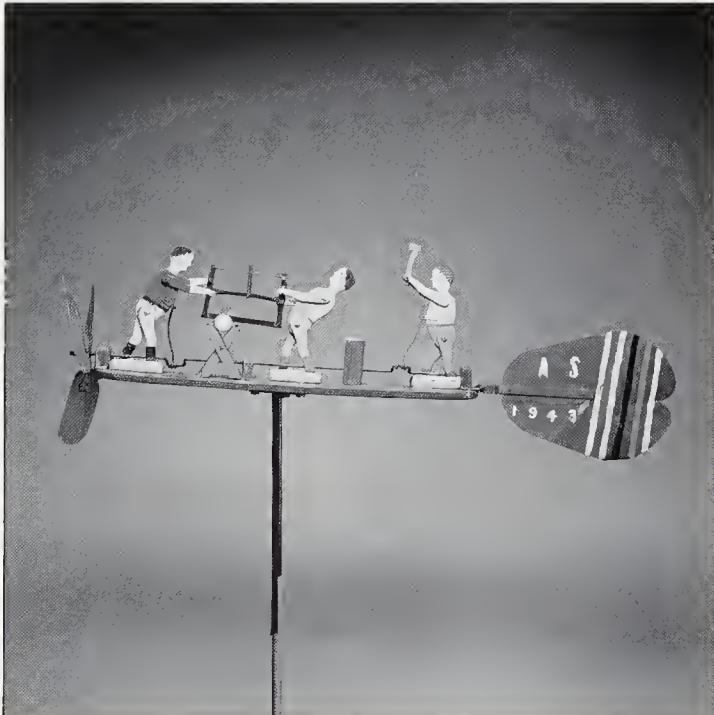
Date unknown

Wood, sheet metal, iron, paint

53 x 27 x 43

CCFCS 77-301

This whirligig represents another traditional occupation: drawing water at the well. The figure's delicately carved features are the work of a skilful artisan.



38

### Cutting Up Firewood

Quebec

1943

Wood, sheet metal, iron, paint

138 x 42 x 49

CCFCS 77-326

This whirligig depicts a delightful scene full of life and humour. The exaggerated gestures of the energetic figures convey the boisterousness of ribald lumberjacks. Powered by a propeller with a short blade span, the crankshaft transmits a wide back-and-forth motion to the sawyers and the wood splitter. The inscription A.S. 1943 on the tail fin is probably the artisan's initials and the date the piece was made.

39

## Churning

Erskine Brown

Thornbury, Ontario

Between 1958 and 1980

Wood, sheet metal, iron, paint

56 x 29 x 42

CCFCS 74-1030

Erskine Brown—a matchless breeder, a ploughing champion, and an authority on farm machinery—used to carve in his spare time. But after retiring at the age of sixty-six, he took up woodcarving as a full-time occupation. He produced hundreds of miniature carvings that depict the daily chores and life on a traditional Ontario farm. This beautiful whirligig represents a farmer's wife churning her butter. The fin is a stylized flag.



40

## Angler

Joseph Lajoie

Saint-Gabriel-de-Brandon, Quebec

1970s

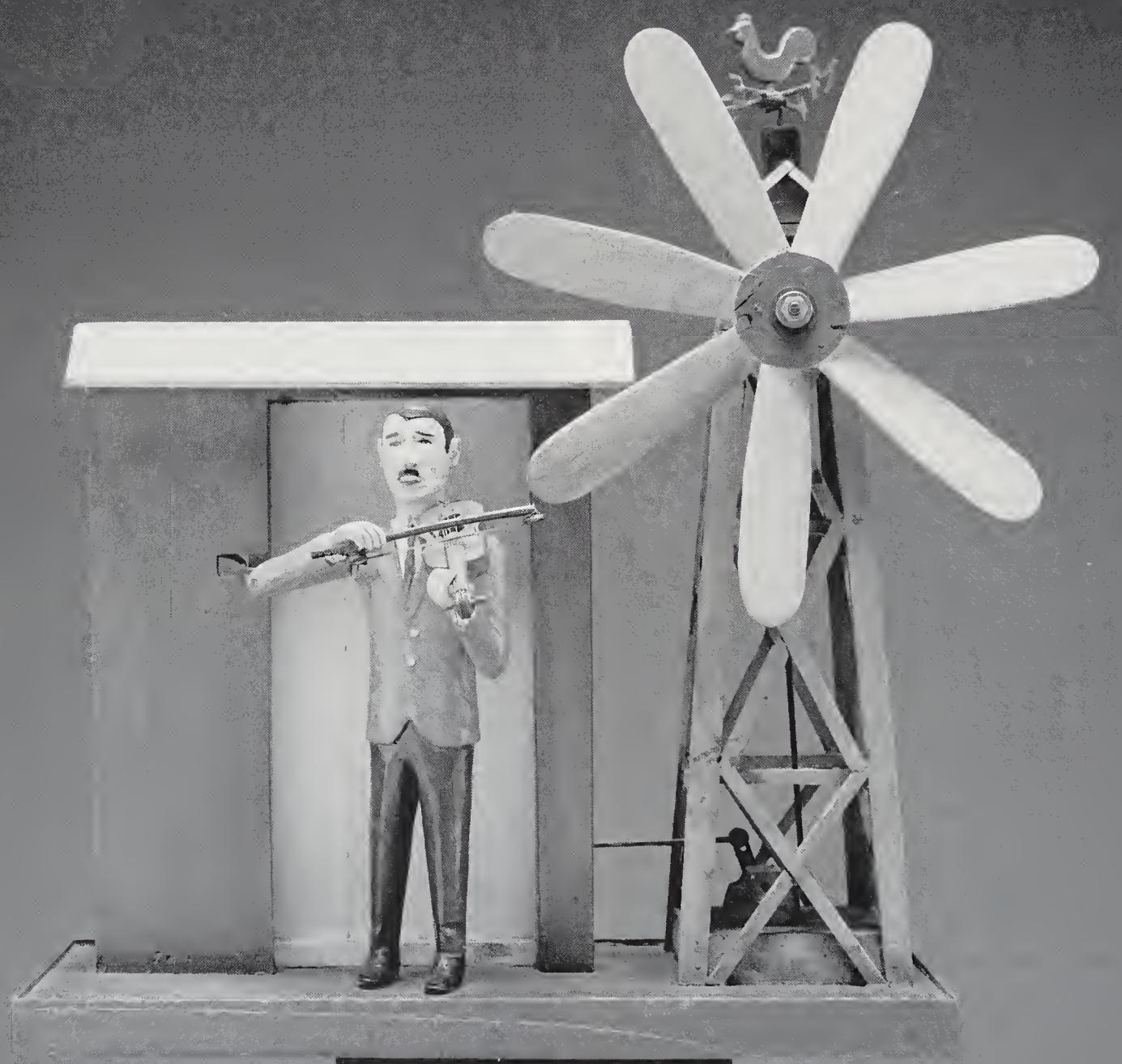
Wood, sheet metal, iron, paint

58 x 51 x 51

CCFCS 77-465 (N. Sharpe Coll.)

The creator of the flocks of birds (numbers 16 and 17) also carved this intriguing fishing scene. Here he uses the same suspension technique to show us what goes on beneath the fishing boat. The propeller is connected to a very short crankshaft, which transmits a back-and-forth motion to the fisherman's body so that the fishing line moves up and down. The boat acts as the whirligig's fin.





# *Fancies and Fantasies*

---

Unhampered by any formal rules, whirligigs are perhaps the ideal vehicle for the expression of outlandish dreams and irrational inner drives. They provide a legitimate outlet for mad or shocking behaviour. Unquenched lust for power, morbid penchant for mockery, utopian yearnings, sly lechery, hallucinations of speed, deep-rooted fears, and illusions of sun and wind—these are but some of the secrets revealed by the assorted contraptions that whirl and gig on their creators' lawns.

41

## **Fiddler**

*James Robertson*

*Flesherton, Ontario*

*Between 1950 and 1977*

*Wood, iron, paint*

*36 x 15 x 43*

*CCFCS 78-337*

This colourful and original whirligig combines some disparate elements. An old windmill, like those that until recently graced the countryside and pumped water for the livestock, is topped by a weathercock on the four cardinal points. Next to the windmill is a small building reminiscent of an old-fashioned dairy. And apparently coming out of the dairy is the totally incongruous figure of a fiddler.



42

**Rider and Attendants***Madoc, Ontario**Early twentieth century**Wood, iron**55 x 34 x 53**CCFCS 82-183 (P. & R. Price Coll.)*

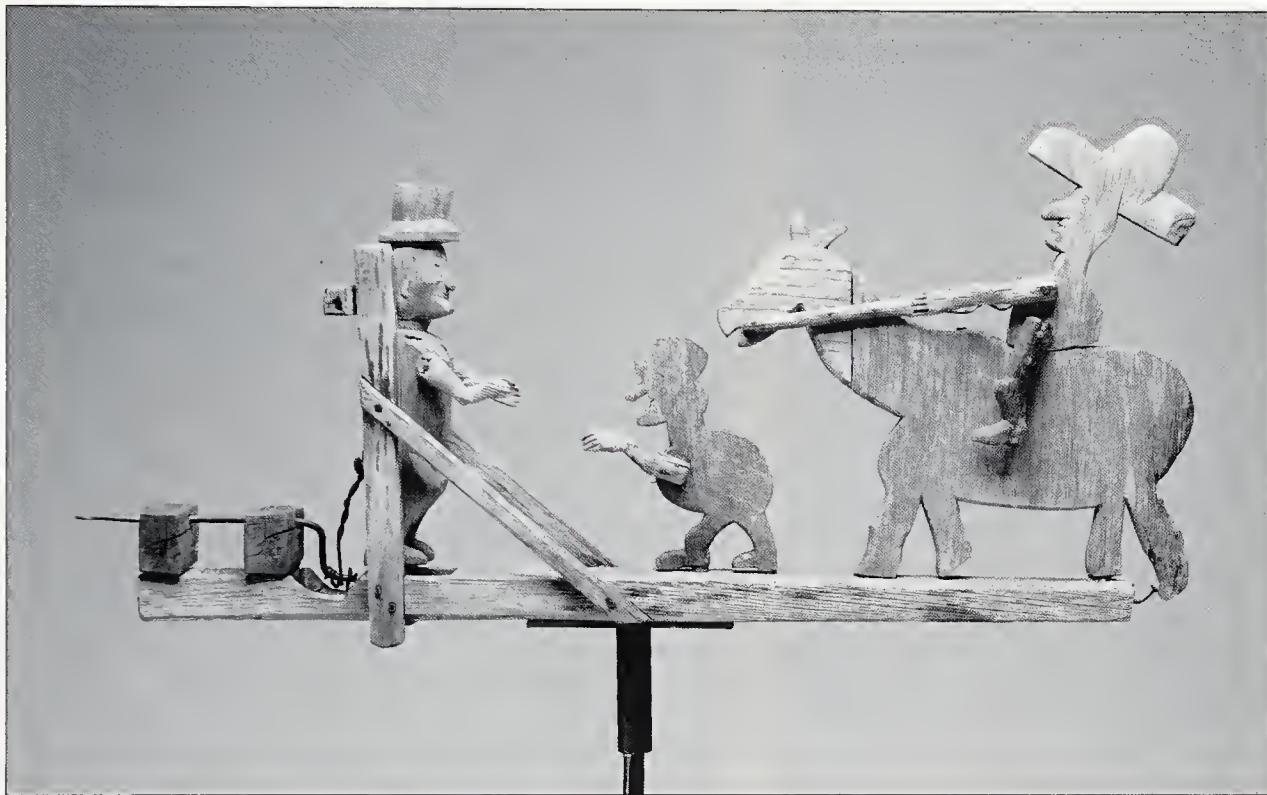
There are three figures in this whirligig, one on horseback and the other two on foot—perhaps a rider and his attendants.



43

**Wheel***Arthème Saint-Germain**Thurso, Quebec**1960s**Wood, iron, sheet metal, bicycle wheel, paint**86 (diam.) x 109**CCFCS 73-1075**Gift of P. Théberge*

This whirligig consists of a bicycle wheel encircled with wood and equipped with sheet-metal fins that have been folded to catch the wind. The apparatus is mounted between two posts joined by a crosspiece.



44

### The Cowboy, the Dwarf and the Petty Noble

Leo Morton

Barss Corner, Nova Scotia

Twentieth century

Wood, iron

84 x 10 x 37

CCFCS 77-307

This whirligig depicts a humorous playlet: The cowboy, wearing a gigantic sombrero, is mounting a rather stubborn mule. The potbellied dwarf in the middle, with his prominent nose and chin, is holding an iron spearhead. He appears to be enjoying himself at the expense of the third figure, a petty noble in a funny top hat, whom he is forcing to dance. The noble is, in fact, the only mobile figure of the three. Connected to a crankshaft once activated by a propeller, he performed giant leaps.



45

### Dancers

Saint-Hyacinthe area, Quebec

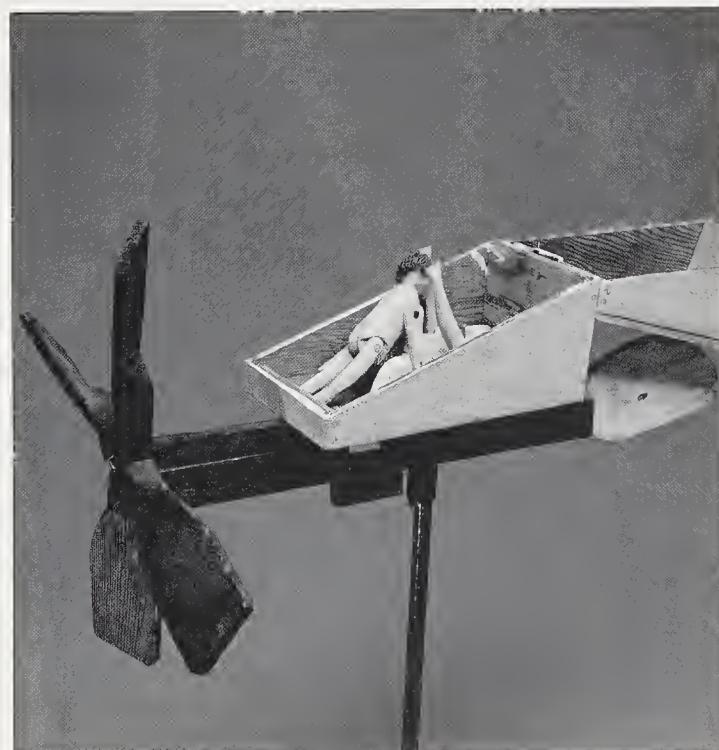
Date unknown

Wood, iron, fabric, paint

78 x 46 x 74

CCFCS 75-505

This whirligig has a four-bladed propeller shaped like a cross, which activates a crankshaft, imparting motion to what seems to be a dancing couple.



46

### Mystery in a Box

Nova Scotia

Date unknown

Wood, iron, paint

62 x 38 x 57

CCFCS 77-215 (G. Ferguson Coll.)

Folk artists often enjoy expressing their erotic fantasies in their art. This whirligig's box hides a copulating couple. Driven by the propeller, the crankshaft imparts the appropriate back-and-forth motion to the couple. One can well imagine the smile on the craftsman's face as he displayed in his garden this mysterious box, which no doubt aroused visitors' curiosity. Of course, only a privileged few were granted a viewing.



47

### Cyclist

Arthur Sauvé

Maxville, Ontario

1949

Wood, metal, string, varnish

58 x 44.5 x 76

CCFCS 89-8

With his hat perched firmly on his head and his starchy bearing, this cyclist proudly seated on his CCM bicycle is indeed an amusing study.



48

**Race Car Driver**

Pipher family  
Stouffville, Ontario

Circa 1925

Wood, sheet metal, iron, paint

78 x 17 x 131

CCFCS 74-593

This rather bizarre whirligig conveys the urge for speed. It depicts a race car driver in his gear for the big event. But the pyramid-shaped tower topped by a sphere seems totally incongruous.



49

**The Chase**

Robert Campbell  
Gilbert Plains, Manitoba

1960s

Wood, sheet metal, iron, wire, paint

48.5 (diam.) x 81.5

CCFCS 70-60

In cattle-raising areas, it is not unusual for someone to be chased by an angry bull. This scene, the humorous creation of a Manitoban craftsman, is in the amusing form of a tiny carousel. Vertically attached aluminum cups catch the wind and transmit a circular motion to the scene, which is mounted on a plywood disc centred on a spindle.

50

## Carousel

F. Nicholson

Gilbert Plains, Manitoba

Between 1965 and 1970

Wood, sheet metal, iron, paint

25.5 (diam.) x 42

CCFCS 71-698

This carousel is quite ingenuous. Five cone-shaped cups, made of thin sheet metal, have been mounted on the outside of the circular wooden platform in order to catch the wind and cause the carousel to turn. Ten figures, also cut from sheet metal, conduct a merry, senseless march. A roof shelters the colourful figures from inclement weather.



51

## Whimsical Fan

Arthème Saint-Germain

Thurso, Quebec

1960s

Sheet metal, iron, wood, paint

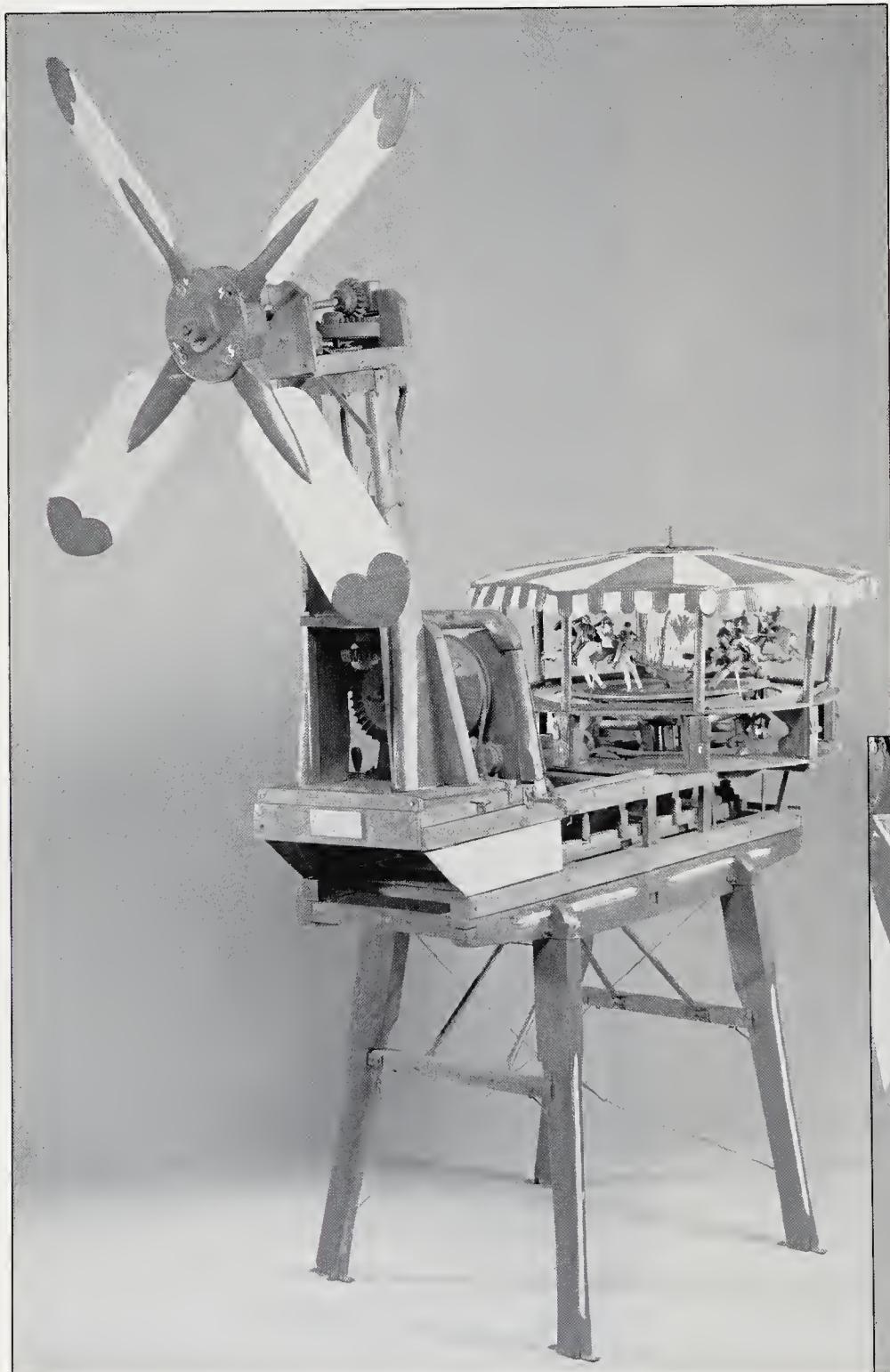
42 (diam.) x 99

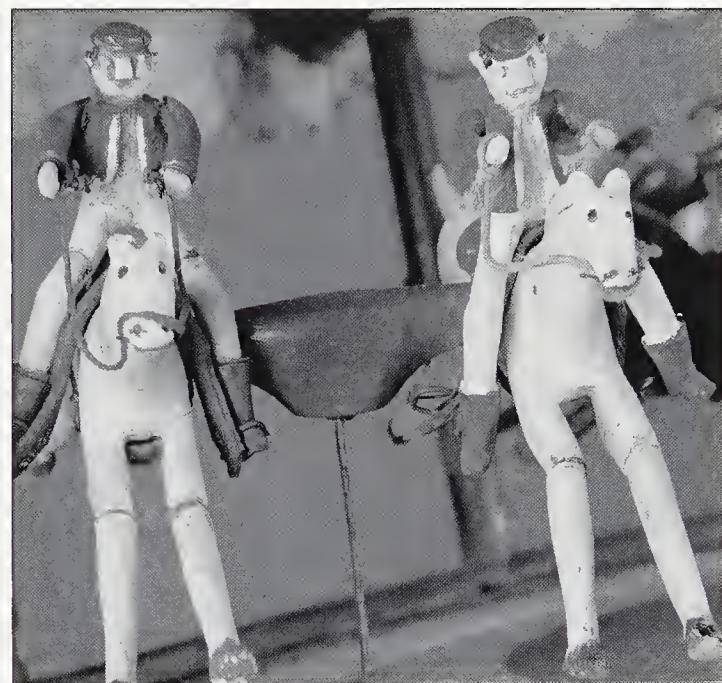
CCFCS 73-1076

Gift of P. Théberge

Here is a typical example of how folk artists can impart new life to old objects. This old barn fan was painted in bright colours and given a new setting, where it was powered by the wind.







52

## Carousel

Ovila Mousseau

Fort-Coulonge, Quebec

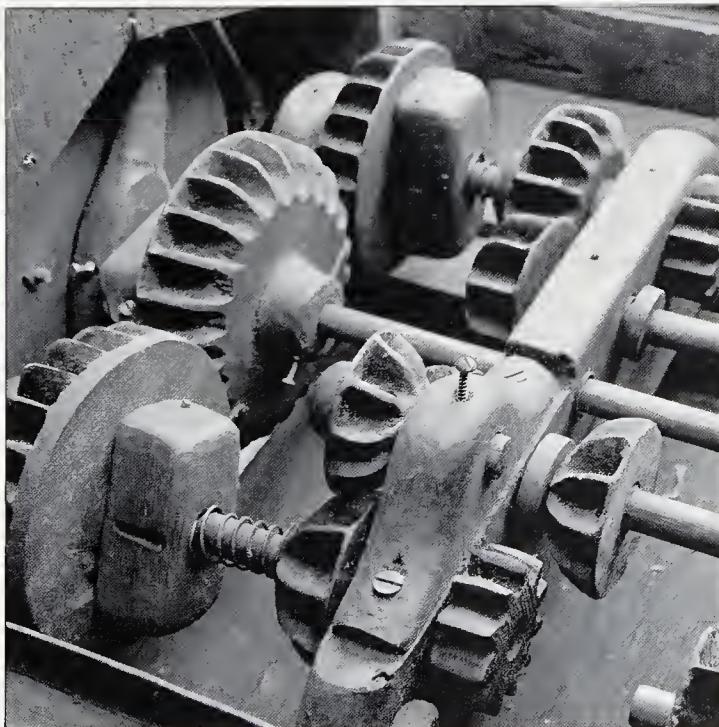
1915

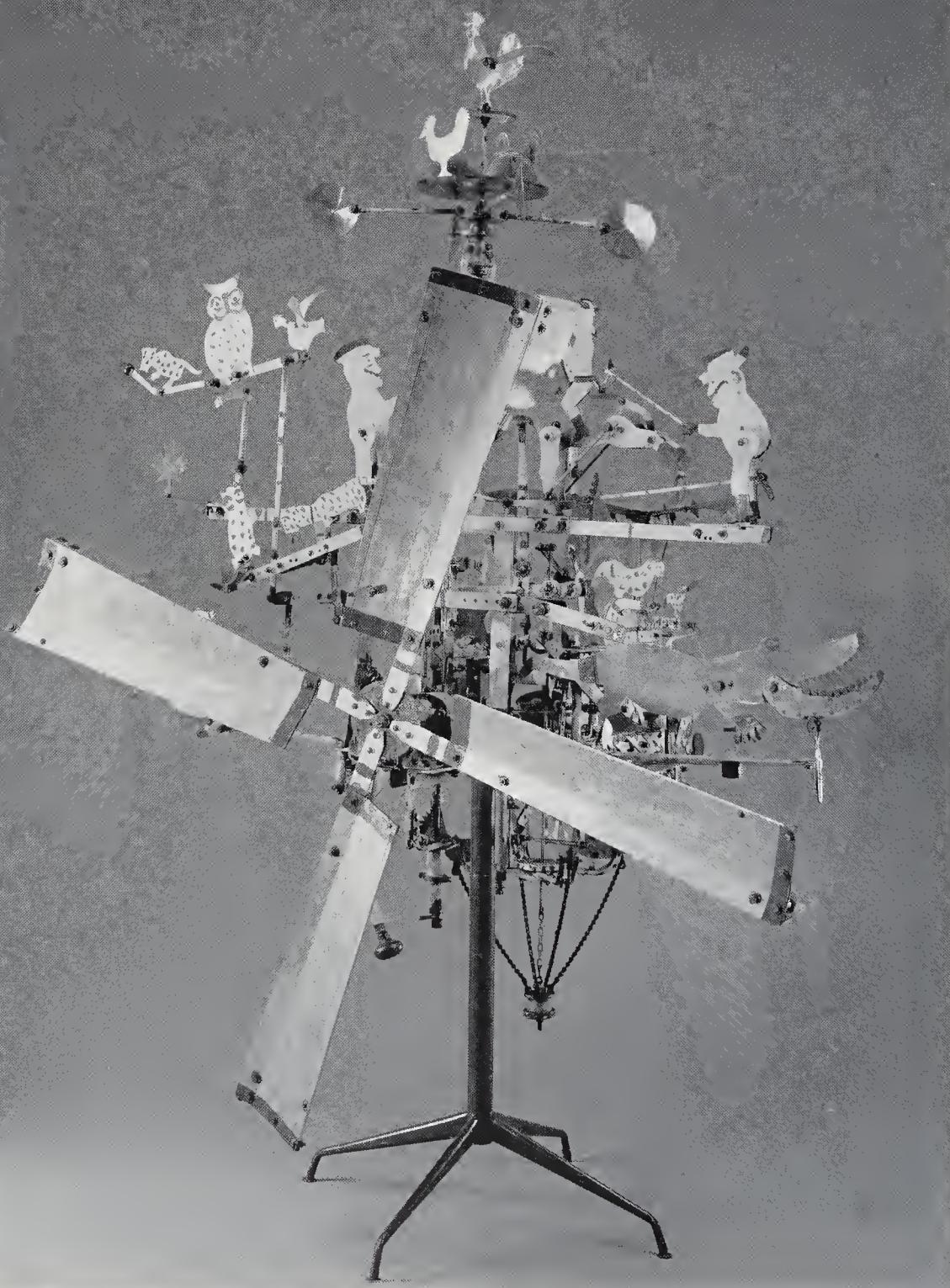
Wood, iron, sheet metal, leather, paint

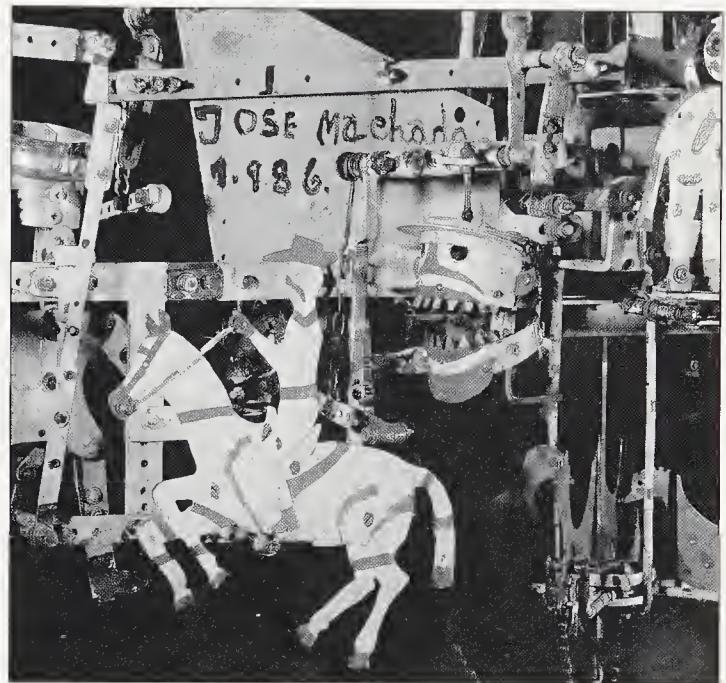
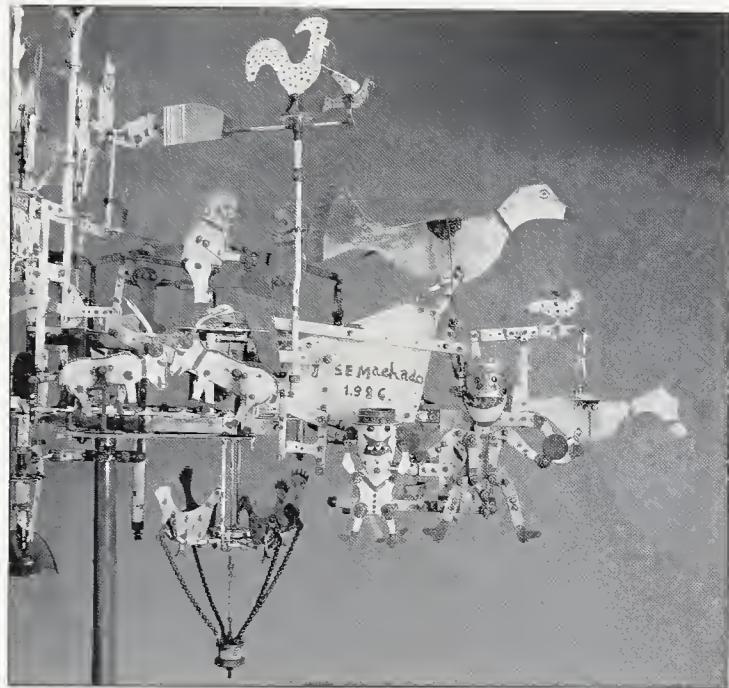
132 x 187 x 272

CCFCS 90-187.1-3

The carousel is a constant source of fascination. The artisan's skill is truly challenged by its variety of articulated parts, its profusion of images and movements, and its wealth of shapes and colours. An extraordinary feature of this enormous whirligig is that all its gears are of carved hardwood.

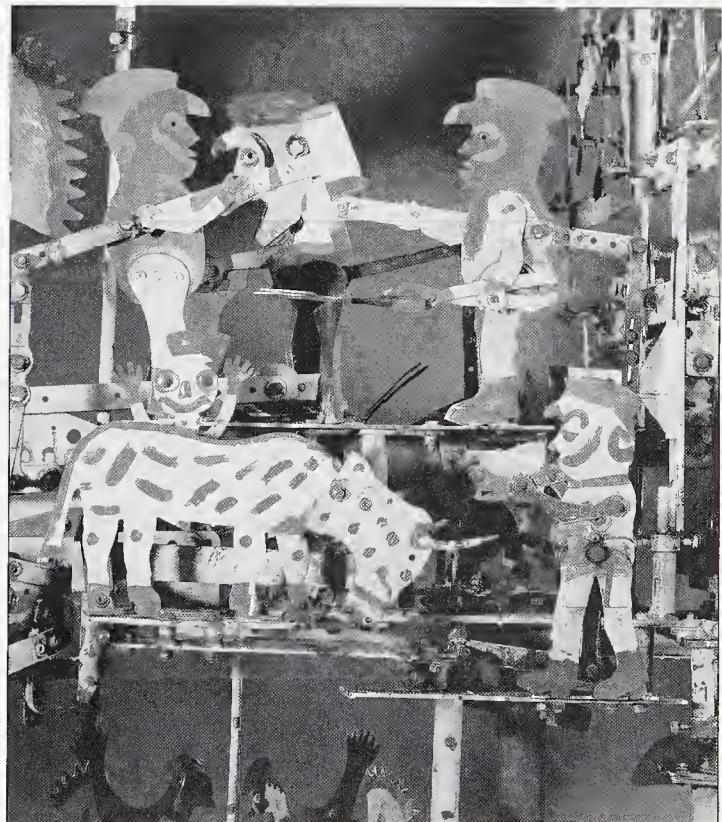


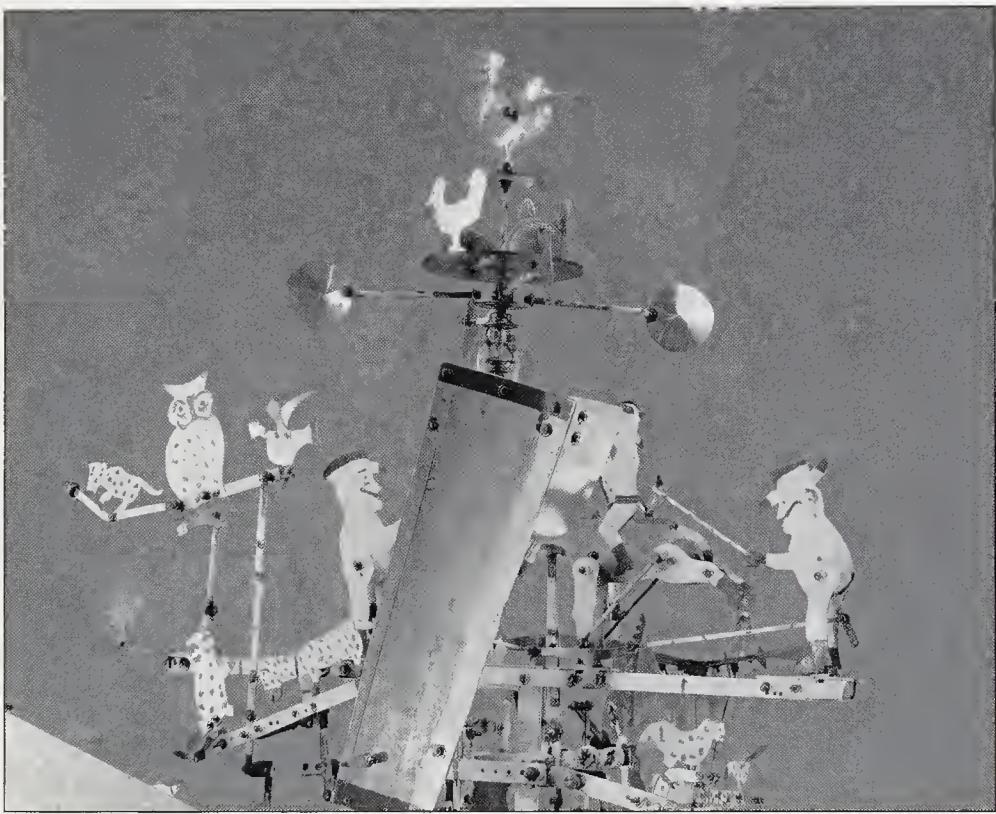




53  
**Hallucinations**  
José Machado  
Toronto, Ontario  
1986  
Iron, sheet metal, plastic, paint  
180 x 160 x 232  
CCFCS 90-186.1-2

That this octogenarian from the Azores was a blacksmith and a mechanic all his life is clearly illustrated in his gigantic whirligig, which has been bolted, riveted, wrought, soldered, and pinned. The entire mechanical structure appears to have been assembled without a plan, the scenes added on in a maddening disorder according to the craftsman's passing fancies. Nevertheless, this moving conglomeration of fantasies is the quintessential whirligig. Activated by a complex system of pulleys, levers and gears, it combines several traditional whirligig themes. A crocodile snaps its





huge jaws; a carpenter saws a board; two billy goats ferociously butt heads; several birds flap their wings or peck; a stubborn mule resists its master's staff; an angler pulls in a fish; two blacksmiths hammer an anvil; a toreador prepares to slay a bull; and a few little monsters reminiscent of the video-game Pacman open and close their oversize jaws. For all its eccentricity, this enormous oddity is well fashioned and precisely adjusted. Activated by its heavy propeller, it is a staggering spectacle, to which passersby reacted with amazement, admiration, and merriment.

54

### The Sun

Arthème Saint-Germain

Thurso, Quebec

1960s

Sheet tin, iron, paint

79 x 61 x 61

CCFCS 73-1077

Gift of P. Théberge

Arthème Saint-Germain's lawn was alive with brightly coloured whirligigs, many depicting a sun theme. The sun in this whirligig is a reproduction of the symbol used at "Man and His World," the world fair held in Montréal in 1967. Below the sun hangs a horizontal cross, at the ends of which are two birds and a dog; a fourth animal has been lost.



55

### Windmill

Arthème Saint-Germain

Thurso, Quebec

1960s

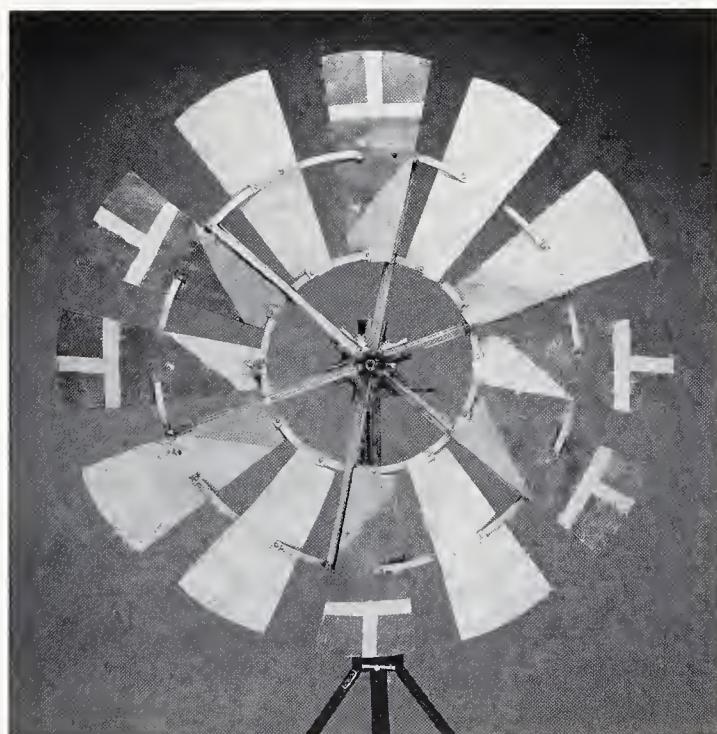
Sheet metal, iron, paint

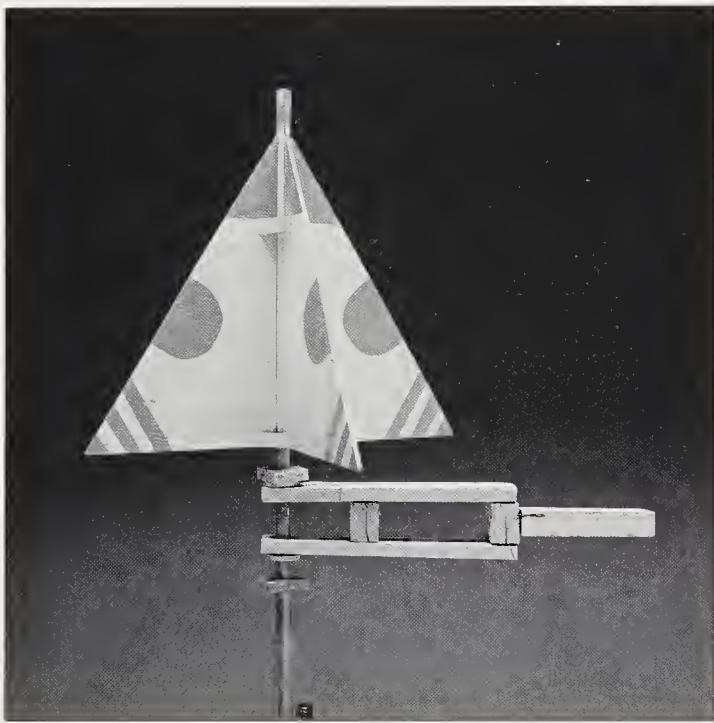
42.5 (diam.)

CCFCS 73-1072

Gift of P. Théberge

This whirligig was fashioned from an old windmill, probably used to pump water for livestock. The craftsman had mounted it on a short tower.





56

**Sails**

Arthème Saint-Germain

Thurso, Quebec

1960s

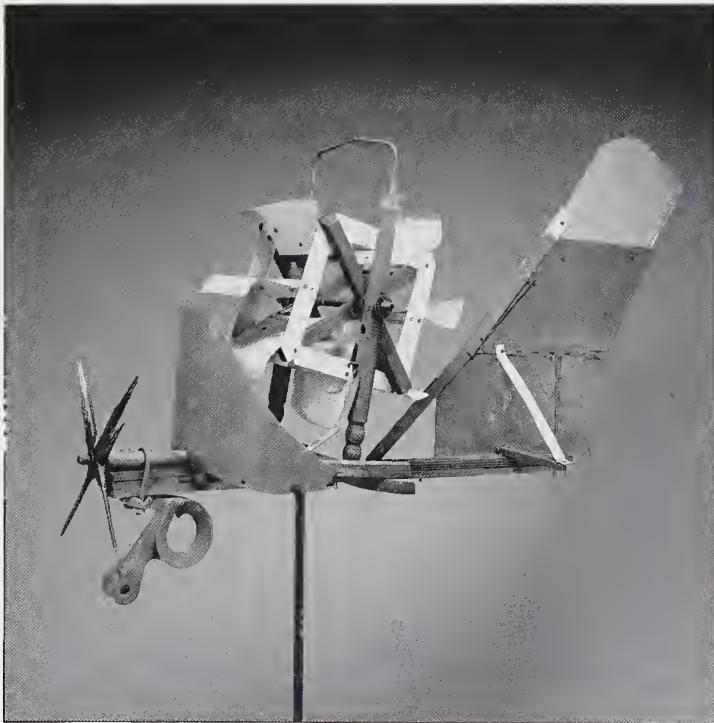
Wood, iron, paint

108 x 74 x 42

CCFCS 73-1073

Gift of P. Théberge

Four triangular sails are mounted in a cross formation on a spindle and twirl in the slightest wind.



57

**Wind Turbine**

M. Palmer

Manitoulin Island, Ontario

Circa 1965

Wood, sheet metal, iron, paint

136 x 92 x 70

CCFCS 85-1979 (P. & R. Price Coll.)

This whirligig combines two different mechanisms: a propeller and a turbine. The large fin was necessary to keep it pointed into the wind.

**Waddling Geese**

Arthème Saint-Germain

Thurso, Quebec

1960s

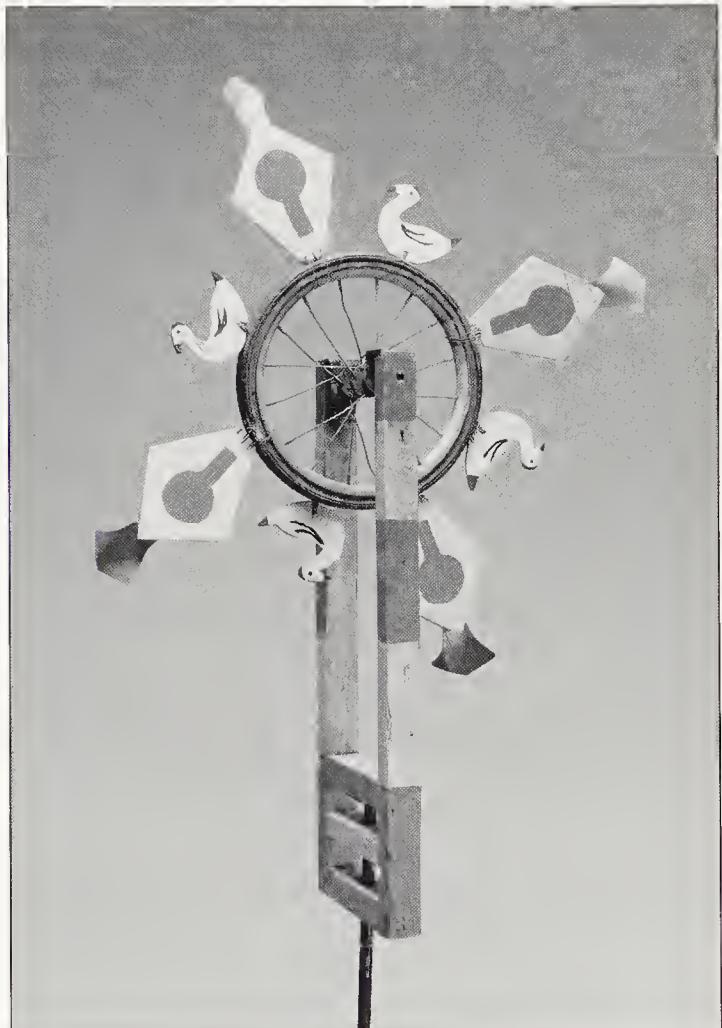
Wood, sheet metal, bicycle wheel, paint

89 x 59 x 24

CCFCS 73-1074

Gift of P. Théberge

Mounted on the wheel of a child's bicycle, this whirligig represents a sun with four diamond-shaped rays, interspersed with waddling geese. The diamonds are topped with metal plates, which catch the wind.



TRENT UNIVERSITY



0 1164 0425969 3

# *Playing with the Wind*

## *The Whirligig Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization*

Whirligigs are wind toys, fanciful objects designed to catch the wind and delight the imagination. They express the visions, dreams, fantasies and humour of artisans who enjoy experimenting with shapes and colours. Whirligigs weave a special tale—a contemporary adventure into the realm of imagination.

Pierre Crépeau is an anthropologist who worked for many years in the field of folk culture at the Canadian Museum of Civilization and has published several works. Now retired, he lives in his quiet home in the Outaouais.

Also published in the same series:

*Pointing at the Wind: The Weather-Vane Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization*



CANADIAN MUSEUM  
OF CIVILIZATION

MUSÉE CANADIEN  
DES CIVILISATIONS

ISBN 0-660-12923-X

9 780660 129235